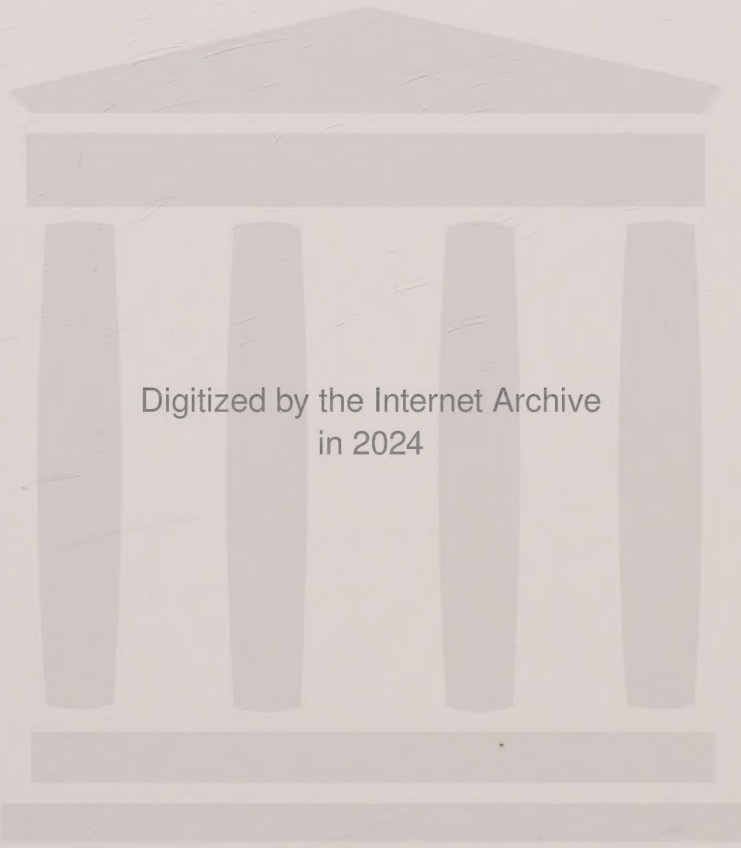


TRADITION,
INTERPRETATION,
and SCIENCE

Political Theory in the
American Academy

edited by JOHN S. NELSON



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**Tradition,
Interpretation,
And
Science**

SUNY Series in Political Theory:

Contemporary Issues

John G. Gunnell, Editor

Tradition, Interpretation, And Science

*Political Theory in
The American Academy*

Edited
By:

JOHN S. NELSON

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for

*Jack Gunnell, Paul Kress, and Ira Strauber
Close Colleagues of the Best Kind!*

CONTENTS

	Preface	ix
	Abbreviations for Publications By John G. Gunnell	xv
I.	Irony and Autonomy: How and Why to Read John Gunnell <i>John S. Nelson</i>	1
II.	Political Theory, History, and Myth: A Salute to John Gunnell <i>J.G.A. Pocock</i>	21
III.	History and Theory: Methodism <i>Redivivus</i> <i>Sheldon S. Wolin</i>	43
IV.	Philosophy and History: John Gunnell and Leo Strauss on Tradition and Interpretation <i>Nathan Tarcov</i>	69
V.	Rigidities in the Study of Political Theory <i>George Kateb</i>	113
VI.	Philosophy, Political Theory, and Practice <i>Richard E. Flathman</i>	145
VII.	Remembrance of Times Lost: On the Recoverability of Political Traditions <i>Russell L. Hanson</i>	171
VIII.	Social Critique in Contemporary Political Theory: On the Contributions of John Gunnell <i>Paul F. Kress</i>	201
IX.	Time, Historicity, and Political Theory: John Gunnell's "Detour" in Postmodern Perspective <i>Herbert G. Reid</i>	217
X.	Why Should Practicing Political Scientists Care About the Philosophy of Social Sciences? <i>J. Donald Moon</i>	241

XI.	Politics and Values in a World Without Criteria <i>Ira L. Strauber</i>	257
XII.	Destroying Political Theory in Order to Save It (Or, John Gunnell Turns on the Western Tradition) <i>John S. Nelson</i>	281
XIII.	Annals of Political Theory: Replies and Reflections <i>John G. Gunnell</i>	319
	Index	367

PREFACE

In recommending this book for publication, a reviewer summarized it as a “clash of the titans” in political theory. Asked to say in a sentence what the contributors have tried to achieve, I can do no better. Together, we intend to reassess the character of political theory in the American academy, in order to clarify the opportunities and troubles that the field now faces.

Creating this book culminated in almost two years of intensive correspondence, writing, and editing—not to mention frequent telephone calls of advice and encouragement. But it has a much longer and more personal history than that may imply. Its origins are worth relating here because they say what the following essays are about, as well as how they came to be. Telling the book’s story lets me explain its contents and their intended significance. It allows me to acknowledge the ample help of others whose names do not appear among those in the table of contents. And it gives me a first opportunity to explain why a book about major projects in political theory uses the work of John Gunnell to coordinate its essays.

The book intends to generate conversations among the main persuasions current in political theory. It includes thirteen chapters by twelve theorists who represent most approaches current in the field. Yet the book is less a collection of essays than an integrated treatment of political theory. The vast majority of chapters were composed specifically for the book, to address conjointly the themes stated in its title: issues of tradition, interpretation, and science in political theory. Thus the authors debate:

1. What is political theory?
2. How does it relate to political history and practice?
3. What are practices of politics and traditions of discourse?
4. How should political theory relate to philosophy of inquiry?
5. What does all this imply for the purposes and resources of political theory?

I say “debate” because the positions of each author encounter responses in the arguments of other chapters. Moreover, every chapter pivots on points raised by Gunnell, who responds in the end to each essay.

This device has several advantages. Gunnell's work is so startling a departure from previous endeavors that to address it is to enter the frontiers of political theory. (Most of it is so recent that its first broad assessment is in this book.) Yet care has been taken lest the book bog down in technical details of Gunnell's work. The essays use that work only as a common route into controversies of theory and politics at the heart of the academic study of politics.

Let me emphasize that this is not a *Festschrift*. Every essay in the volume has important bones to pick with Gunnell, even as it partakes of his sense of what the pressing issues are. To be sure, a book to confront the main challenges posed by and for political theory need not turn on Gunnell's writings; but it certainly should address them. This is due less to their positions than to their questions. Most of Gunnell's positions are contested by a considerable array of political theorists, and I am often among them. Still, his positions are disputed so vigorously and fruitfully because they stem from questions rightly at the center of current concerns in political theory. And in fact, many of these concerns owe their present form and attention to Gunnell's work.

Accordingly, to write partly about that work is the contributors' way of coordinating their arguments about many of the issues now crucial for the future of political theory. With Gunnell providing a response to the other essays, we hope collectively to convey the lively ethos of a many-sided debate in progress, reflecting the process by which we produced the book.

I first read Gunnell's work when I was an undergraduate, and I have continued to keep up with virtually every word of it since. At the University of Kentucky, Herbert Reid acquainted me with Gunnell's early publications on the philosophy of political inquiry. Then Ernest Yanarella joined the faculty, and he encouraged me to read Gunnell's *Political Philosophy and Time*. Part of my graduate study at the University of North Carolina was with Paul Kress. With Gunnell, he has shared not only initial interests in political epistemology but also later disenchantments with the proclivity of that subject for drawing theorists away from directly political issues.

Several years after I moved to the University of Iowa, Kress put me in touch with Ira Strauber of Grinnell College. Iowa is not dense with political theorists, and colleagues seventy-five miles away are colleagues indeed. Strauber and I were delighted to learn of each other's existence, and we soon identified mutually urgent interests in the issues central to this book. Thanks to grants from the University House of the University of Iowa, we were able to devote a summer of intense effort to reading, talking, and writing together about politics and epistemology. The more we worked together, the more our work turned toward the complex of

questions common to Gunnell and Kress. By the end of the summer, we had started to write about the significance of Gunnell's work in particular.

That fall, I first met Gunnell at a roundtable discussion sponsored by the American Political Science Association and addressing recent projects of political theory. This was a prelude to a winter conference on the condition and direction of political theory. Gunnell's work helped to instigate the two events, because it had consistently been raising some of the basic questions that need to be faced by political inquiries of all kinds, if they are to improve themselves. Discussions surrounding both occasions made clear that Gunnell's work had begun to generate persistent interest among political theorists. Few appeared to agree completely with Gunnell, but many seemed to find his work valuable or even indispensable for thinking through their own positions. The two occasions also suggested that the time had come to engage Gunnell's issues directly and in terms of his particular arguments.

As a result, one of the 1982 panels of the Foundation of Political Theory Group was devoted to Gunnell's work. There Sheldon Wolin, Strauber, and I presented drafts of three essays later revised for this book. Henry Kariel chaired the proceedings, and Gunnell offered a friendly reply to his commentators. The attendance and enthusiasm for that panel persuaded its participants to prepare their contributions for joint publication, and I sought out additional chapters by others eager to address major projects and problems of political theory, through the medium of Gunnell's work.

In the time taken to complete this book, interest in Gunnell's work and the issues it raises has intensified. This is especially evident in political theory and philosophy of political inquiry, but it is becoming apparent as well in other fields. Throughout the humanities and social sciences, there is growing concern for the character of conventions and practices, the status of canons and traditions, and the relationship of epistemologies to inquiry. Increasing resistance to transcendental principles and foundational methods has renewed arguments about the features and uses of theory in many fields. Gunnell's work crystallizes widespread discontent with earlier treatments of issues; and challenges similar to his are beginning to arise in such other disciplines as history, economics, philosophy, sociology, and literature.

The initial essays concentrate on traditions of politics and theory, particularly as presented in the history of political thought. To introduce the later chapters, the book begins with my account of how Gunnell's writings identify major issues for political theory. The introduction also describes what roads remain to be taken in responding to those issues and how this book contributes to their exploration.

The next three essays respond to Gunnell's attempts to dispel "the myth of the tradition" dominating political theory in the twentieth century. Writing on behalf of what is sometimes called "the new history" of political theory, J.G.A. Pocock explains the principles that inform his treatment of classic and other past texts about politics. His rebuttal of Gunnell's criticisms is printed here with the permission of the *Annals of Scholarship*, where the essay first appeared. Next Sheldon Wolin replies to Gunnell's treatment of Wolin's own work, emblematic of what is sometimes termed "the Berkeley school" of political theory. Nowhere else has Wolin addressed as directly the ambitions and career of his contributions to political theory. Then Nathan Tarcov defends and reconstructs Straussian political philosophy in the light of Gunnell's criticisms of Leo Strauss. Tarcov's essay is remarkable for its new vision of political theory for the next generation of Straussian scholars. A short version of his essay appeared in *Polity*; with the approval of that journal, the chapter published here is substantially longer and written specifically for this book.

The fifth and sixth essays focus on the relevance to political theory of recent theories about literature and language. George Kateb plays Gunnell against deconstructivists in literary theory to explain how politics and theories should be read. In doing so, he defends traditional practices of political theory against Gunnell's accusations of interpretive incoherence and political irrelevance. In the essay following, Richard Flathman rebuts Gunnell's reservations about conceptual analysis and analytical philosophies of politics, defending a future for those enterprises in political theory. As with Wolin, this is the first time that Flathman has stepped back to reflect comprehensively on the conditions and rationale for his project in political theory.

Chapters VII through IX explore the role of criticism in political theory and especially the place of Critical Theory. Drawing on the contextualism of Gunnell, the hermeneutics of Hans-Georg Gadamer, and the neo-Marxism of Jürgen Habermas, Russell Hanson examines the political importance of traditions. This allows him to explore the rhetorical force of neo-Marxism in criticizing politics past, present, and future. Parts of Hanson's essay appear in Chapter 12 of *The Democratic Imagination in America* (1985) and are reprinted by permission of Princeton University Press. By contrast, Paul Kress shares some of Gunnell's suspicion of Marxist claims about Critical Theory. Yet Kress argues nonetheless that Gunnell's notion of political theory fails to appreciate the difficulty and urgency of social criticism. In the same vein, Herbert Reid speaks for recent neo-Marxists and phenomenologists in rebutting Gunnell's case against Critical Theory. Thus Reid invokes Alain Touraine's sociology of action as the

kind of corrective required to overcome Gunnell's alienation of political theory from actual politics.

Chapters X through XII address recent debates about political epistemology and the conduct of political inquiry. Initially, the focus is the philosophy of social science, which Gunnell regards as a plague on the houses of political science and theory. The work of Donald Moon has been a target of Gunnell's complaints against metatheory, and here Moon replies for the first time to Gunnell's arguments against tying political theory to philosophy of inquiry. In their stead, he presents a distinctive vision of proper and helpful relations between the two domains. In the next chapter, Ira Strauber criticizes the political implications of Gunnell's treatment of epistemology and values. Through Gunnell, Strauber explores the attractions and troubles of the radical rejection of foundations newly popular among some philosophers. Against a similar background, the twelfth chapter portrays Gunnell as a deconstructor of political theory and practice in pluralist society. There I trace Gunnell's inspiration to Martin Heidegger, and I argue accordingly that his paradoxical ambition is to destroy political theory in order to save it.

The book ends in a reply by Gunnell that responds individually to each of the other authors. More importantly, Gunnell provides a forceful presentation of his special perspectives on political theory and the philosophy of inquiry. Of all his writing to date, this is at once the most concise and detailed statement of the way his diverse concerns reinforce one another in a coherent whole. It is also his most personal and compelling presentation of the evolution of his positions.

In an essay written originally for the book, Kathleen Toth locates Gunnell's problematic in a continuing conversation about the subjects, objects, and boundaries of political inquiry. Because her essay has recently become part of an *Annals of Scholarship* symposium that also includes papers by Gunnell and Pocock, it does not appear here. Nonetheless, this volume as a whole carries forward her exploration of the relationship of political theory to other fields of inquiry, and the authors appreciate her role in the thinking that went into the book.

Throughout the production of the book, Jack Gunnell has remained an ideal subject of debate: friendly, constructive, but pointed in his interaction with critics. I speak for every author of the book in expressing gratitude for Gunnell's work, both before and toward this volume. The book is better also for the advice of Ira Strauber, whom I thank as well for general sustenance of the mind. The poetry at the end of George Kateb's essay is reprinted with permission of Macmillan Publishing Company from the *Collected Poems* by William Butler Yeats, copyright 1933 by Macmillan and renewed in 1961 by Bertha Georgie Yeats. Time for com-

posing the book was contributed by the University of Iowa through a Faculty Scholarship and a University House Interdisciplinary Research Grant. I am also grateful for the aid of Katy Neckerman in proofing and indexing the manuscript. But as always, the main support for my work remains my family. Again I thank you, Connie, Anna, and Aaron.

ABBREVIATIONS FOR PUBLICATIONS BY JOHN G. GUNNELL

BPP	<i>Between Philosophy and Politics</i> , Amherst, University of Massachusetts Press, 1986
DESSI	"Deduction, Explanation, and Social Scientific Inquiry," <i>American Political Science Review</i> , 63, 4, December, 1969, 1233-1246.
DSCT	"Development, Social Change, and Time," <i>Temporal Dimensions of Development Administration</i> , Dwight Waldo, ed., Durham, NC, Duke University Press, 1970, 47-89.
ETK	"Encounters of a Third Kind: The Alienation of Theory in American Political Science," <i>American Journal of Political Science</i> , 25, 3, August, 1981, 440-461.
ICF	"The Idea of the Conceptual Framework: A Philosophical Critique," <i>Journal of Comparative Administration</i> , 1, 2, August, 1969, 140-176.
IHPT	"Interpretation and the History of Political Theory: Apology and Epistemology," <i>American Political Science Review</i> , 76, 2, June, 1982, 317-327.
ISPO	"In Search of the Political Object: Beyond Methodology and Transcendentalism," <i>What Should Political Theory Be Now?</i> , John S. Nelson, ed., Albany, State University of New York Press, 1983, 25-52.
MMST	"Method, Methodology, and the Search for Traditions in the History of Political Theory: A Reply to Pocock's Salute," <i>Annals of Scholarship</i> , 1, 4, Fall, 1980, 26-56.
MT	"The Myth of the Tradition," <i>American Political Science Review</i> , 72, 1, March, 1978, 122-134.
PhPT	"Philosophy and Political Theory," <i>Government and Opposition</i> , 14, 2, Spring, 1979, 198-216.
PICA	"Political Inquiry and the Concept of Action: A Phenomenological Analysis," <i>Phenomenology and the Social Sciences</i> , Volume 2, Maurice Natanson, ed., Evanston, IL, Northwestern University Press, 1973, 197-275.

- PoPT** "Politics and Political Theory: The Case of Leo Strauss," *Political Theory*, 13, 3, August, 1985, 339-361.
- PPhT** *Political Philosophy and Time*, Middletown, CT, Wesleyan University Press, 1968.
- PPMT** "Political Philosophy and the Myth of the Tradition," *The Study of Time, Volume II*, J. T. Fraser and N. Lawrence, eds., New York, Springer-Verlag, 1975, 283-294.
- PPS** "Philosophy and Political Science: Some Persistent Problems," *Polity*, 9, 3, Spring, 1977, 344-355.
- PSPI** *Philosophy, Science, and Political Inquiry*, Morristown, NJ, Silver Burdett, 1975.
- PSPT** "Political Science and the Poverty of Theory," *Through the Looking-Glass: Epistemology and the Conduct of Inquiry*, Maria J. Falco, ed., Washington, DC, University Press of America, 1979, 92-110.
- PSTA** "Political Science and the Theory of Action: Prolegomena," *Political Theory*, 7, 1, February, 1979, 75-100.
- PT** *Political Theory: Tradition and Interpretation*, Cambridge, MA, Winthrop, 1979.
- PTES** "Political Theory: The Evolution of a Sub-field," *Political Science: The State of the Discipline*, Ada Finifter, ed., Washington, DC, American Political Science Association, 1983, 3-45.
- PTTA** "Political Theory and the Theory of Action," *Western Political Quarterly*, 34, 3, September, 1981, 341-358.
- SPS** "Science and Philosophy of Science: A Rejoinder to Professors Goldberg and Gregor," *American Political Science Review*, 63, 4, December, 1969, 1259-1262.
- SSK** "Social Scientific Knowledge and Policy Decisions: A Critique of the Intellectualist Model," *Complex Policy Systems: Problems of Theory*, Phillip Gregg, ed., Lexington, D. C. Heath, 1976, 29-38.
- SSPR** "Social Science and Political Reality: The Problem of Explanation," *Social Research*, 35, 1, Spring, 1968, 159-201.

- TCD** *Time and the Concept of Development*, Bloomington, IN, American Society for Public Administration, 1966.
- TITT** "The Technocratic Image and the Theory of Technocracy," *Technology and Culture*, 23, 3, July, 1982, 392-416.

CHAPTER I

Irony and Autonomy: How and Why to Read John Gunnell

JOHN S. NELSON

The absolute scholar is in fact a rather uncanny being.
—George Steiner¹

Political theory in the American academy is a peculiar enterprise. Its kin outside the academy—in journalism and public affairs—have seldom been stronger in quality or standing, yet its status inside the academy has seldom been more in question.² Its canon of classic texts stands in the center of curricula for the humanities and social sciences—featuring works by Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, Augustine, Aquinas, Machiavelli, Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, Mill, Marx, Hegel, Nietzsche, Weber, and many other writers of major rank. Its ambition to trace the main phenomena and ideas that contribute to politics allies it with social and intellectual history. Its desire to discover the key principles and processes of government makes it crucial for sciences of the economy and polity. Its interest in the politics of writing and reading merges it with literary criticism and theory. Its concern for the condition and motivation of political actions and institutions ties it closely to sociology and psychology. Its emphasis on political complexities of aesthetics, ethics, and truth keeps it integral to philosophy. Yet its relations with these distinct projects remain much disputed, because its ends and means remain hotly debated.

The book at hand advances the debate by bringing together representatives of diverse approaches now prominent in political theory. It focuses their arguments on the writing of John G. Gunnell, writing that challenges the conception and conduct of virtually every political project current in the American academy. Long intrigued by Gunnell's arguments about the

alienation of political theory from politics, I invited the book's contributors to reassess their projects in light of Gunnell's criticism. Then I asked Gunnell to reconsider his own work in response to their essays. The result is a series of confrontations: of each theorist with his previous work and with Gunnell's criticism.

These confrontations require an introduction to what the fuss is all about. How do diverse scholars of politics find in the work of John Gunnell good ways to reconceive their craft? Why are they moved to read his work, and he to write it? What is there about Gunnell's writing on political theory and philosophy of inquiry that makes it so worthy of both agreement and disagreement? And whence do its controversial elements come? The essays to follow all address Gunnell's work, but primarily in order to coordinate arguments about the present interests and needs of political theory. Saying directly how and why to read Gunnell is useful for putting their common medium in perspective. How is his writing able to serve this purpose? Why is it better than many other candidates for the same use? What biases does it elicit from or encourage in those who view political inquiry through its lens? Where might we look to complement its viewpoint?

My answers emphasize Gunnell's dedication to the peculiar irony and autonomy of scholarship in the postmodern multiversity.³ These two concerns lead Gunnell to raise issues crucial for approaching political theory as tradition, as interpretation, and as science. Addressing us as scholars of politics, Gunnell disconcerts us because he outdoes us in celebrating the virtues and calibrating the vices of pure scholarship in such a setting. Gunnell's work sensitizes us to the academic, social, and political conditions of political (or almost any other kind of) theory as a field of inquiry. That work is predicated on a particular understanding of recent relationships between scholars and intellectuals, professors and public affairs, theories and practices. It turns on a strict distinction between "knowing that" and "knowing how" that appears plausible primarily in light of the current station and situation of academic communities. Without their strange combination of social scorn and prestige, we would have no reason to share Gunnell's worry about their practical implications. Without their mixed blessing of institutional isolation and fragmentation, we would have no reason to share his concern for their theoretical explanations.

We should read John Gunnell as a frustrated and fearful advocate of scholars putting themselves on the line in their scholarship. "He is instinct with Nietzsche's finding that to be interested in something, to be totally interested in it, is a libidinal thrust more powerful than love or hatred, more tenacious than faith or friendship—not infrequently, indeed, more compelling than personal life itself."⁴ He is attracted to the epic vision of political inquiry:

Political theory is a heroic venture. It is to have the boldness and arrogance to see into the future, to threaten society with disaster, to proclaim not only that institutional arrangements are in some way wrong but that what seems as real to every man as the furniture of the world, including his vision of himself, is in fact an illusion. It is not only to hold out alternatives but to attempt to undertake their realization.⁵

Yet he is repelled by the incompatibility of that vision with requirements of faith, friendship, and especially democracy. He approves the academic commitment to knowledge and truth, but he reviles the academic claim to authority and power that goes with it. He deplores the recent ignorance and irrelevance of political theorists to public affairs. Still, he declaims the dangers of scholars engaging politics on its own terms.

These are no mere contradictions. Instead, they are the marks of agonies and complications worth encountering more fully. Indeed, they are among the issues now central to political theory. To read John Gunnell is to confront them directly and in forms exceptionally pertinent to the academic and political circumstances of our times. It is to address the disparity of politics and political theory, the autonomy of academic inquiries, the controversy of Gunnell's particular positions, and the irony of his general relationship to political inquiry. It is to experience in his writing a Socratic Irony of incongruity, "an Irony latent in every partial and limited view of things, an Irony whose exact measure [is] the distance between a particular illusion and the ultimate truth in which he believe[s] and which he [is] always seeking."⁶

DISPARITY

Political argument has always co-existed with deep theory; the distance between them, the degree of linkage varies over time. Today, however, the relation of the two is peculiarly uncertain. None of the standard theories accounts for our everyday experience.

—Michael Walzer⁷

Gunnell's continuing contribution to the discipline is to identify important weaknesses in major projects of political inquiry. His book on *Political Philosophy and Time* offers an early and still interesting view of traps within the myths of time and order in political theory.⁸ His book concerning *Philosophy, Science, and Political Inquiry* probably remains the most important criticism of recent philosophies of political science.⁹ His book about tradition and interpretation in *Political Theory* is undoubtedly the most provocative criticism to date of recent approaches to the history of political theory.¹⁰ And his many articles that trace the alienation of

political theory from substantive issues of politics occasion conversation throughout the field, for they express a central truth about the present predicament of political scholarship.¹¹

Gunnell conceives the condition of political theory as one of "diffusion" or "dispersion."¹² This is due, in part, to the diversity of political theory—both inside and outside the academy. What becomes increasingly different within itself finds less and less reason or at least ability to cohere as a self, a single entity. Yet the dispersion is due primarily to the alienation or separation of political theory from substantive concerns of political occurrence or practice. Standard theories of politics fail to account for actual political events and institutions. Moreover, academic theories of politics often fail even to address important issues of practical politics.

Why is this? To date, Gunnell has concentrated simply on showing that it is the case. The book at hand was begun on the presumption that his demonstrations merit others' efforts to explore possible justifications and implications. Awaiting the arguments of subsequent essays, therefore, let us assume that Gunnell is largely right to say that the basic condition of political theory is one of alienation and dispersion. Then the causal question reasserts itself: Why is this? Speculatively, let me stitch together the hints that Gunnell has given thus far—in order to outline his apparent diagnosis of the disease of political theory in our day. Our striking disparity between political theory and political experience seems to result from three complications of political life and scholarship associated with the open society and its postmodern multiversity. Because of these complications, we must ask in ways seldom needed before: whose politics, whose experience, and whose terms of understanding or decision?

The need to ask whose politics are at issue stems from what I call the dispersion of politics. In turn, this summarizes four separable perspectives on politics in the open society: (1) the dissemination of avowed politics beyond boundaries of government and throughout activities previously nonpolitical in their self-conception or societal standing, (2) the disruption of established politics by internal and external forces for change, (3) the democratization of normative politics to a point where nonpopular authorities have a difficult time legitimating themselves, and (4) the degeneration of communal politics under "the assumption that men find identity in diverse private communities and that the very purpose of the political is to protect and facilitate this pluralism."¹³

The dissemination of politics involves four (sometimes related) dynamics. One is that many institutions and processes which formerly stood outside the expressly or formally political arena are pulled inside it. Thus politicized, they become a part of the official system of politics; or at least, they become more directly and visibly dependent on it. This is part of

what Americans mean by "the spread of Big Government." Another dynamic ties to what Gunnell and others call "pluralism," although "corporatism" might be more accurate, with public or political functions parceled out among private or special interests. A third dissemination of politics involves internal changes in groups or organizations which render them newly and self-consciously political in purpose. The fourth dynamic similarly politicizes the internal operations of groups or organizations. Thus, to disseminate politics is eventually to diffuse and dilute it. Distinctive spaces for political action disappear, and no specifically public realm remains. "The open society and the simultaneous contraction, depreciation, and loss of identity of the political or public realm go hand in hand, and thus the conditions of theorizing and the object of theorizing tend to disappear together."¹⁴

In effect, the dissemination of politics is a disintegration of politics. Mass politics is not so much politics as mass sociality. Hence, the processes of dissemination are complemented by the processes of disruption. As politics dissolves into society, society invades and disrupts distinctively political affairs. Gunnell suggests that "conditions of extreme tolerance and the soft despotism of mass society that oppresses by ignoring" may be incompatible with politics.¹⁵ Similarly, politics is also disrupted by incursions of economic, technological, artistic, academic, and other foreign requirements. Gunnell appears especially worried about the disruption of politics by academic expertise and knowledge. He warns of "the displacement of democratic, or even political, rationality in modern society."¹⁶ And he argues that "knowledge and politics are ultimately incompatible."¹⁷ Again, the object of political theory is jeopardized.

To some extent, these developments express a dedication to democracy. This readily translates into drives to disseminate politics and to pluralize norms to the point where the jumble of policies and voices exceeds our capacity to attend to them. Another aspect of the democratization of norms reinforces Gunnell's distrust of academic knowledge as an intrusion into political debate and decision. He shares the populist suspicion of self-proclaimed experts, who seldom know what they are talking about and never have a right to tell us what to do. Gunnell would rebuild academic platforms for professors to view politics better, but he would not have them used by professors to preach politics more. Appreciating that our democratic norms disperse politics and disrupt legitimations of hierarchy, he nonetheless stands adamantly against academic claims to political authority as antidemocratic and probably antipolitical.

Finally, the degeneration of communal politics disperses would-be political issues among myriad private associations. Sometimes this disseminates (but changes) politics. Other times, it ignores, distorts, or destroys the specifically political aspects of the issues, especially when they depend

on public or communal standing. When television programmers and sponsors decide what advertising is appropriate for children, the very possibility of communal discussion and decision on that subject decays. Democratism then becomes privatism, and communal politics declines. Any politics that remains is nested in particular groups or institutions.

Gunnell doubts the accuracy and propriety of recent theoretical talk about politics because the dispersion of politics makes generalizations difficult. The received view of scientific theory makes a fetish of generalization and the dissident versions of humanistic theory usually presume some essentialist notion of "the political." With Ludwig Wittgenstein, Gunnell excoriates the philosophical craving for generality and transcendence. But the dispersion of politics in our times gives him specifically political reasons for dispelling overly general claims and questions. It reminds us forcefully of the postmodern diversity of politics, or at least of what we conventionally regard as such. For Gunnell, politics is a conventional object. Therefore, our conventions of dispersion require that good talk about politics identify carefully whose politics is intended. The difficulties of doing this at any level of deep theory are bound to trouble its relation to ordinary political argument, which is dispersed as part of our politics.

Similar troubles arise with the relation of political theory to everyday experience. The dispersion of politics appears to be part of a wider dispersion of ordinary experience in mass societies. This added diversity reasserts the urgency of one of the oldest political questions: Whose experience and whose interests should claim the theorist's attention? Insofar as political theory still responds to our everyday experiences of politics, then, their dispersion tends to infect and fragment it. The academic cult of specialization encourages a dispersion of political theory to match the dispersion of politics. But then political theory is no longer able to speak effectively across divisions of everyday experience, and no more than a small part of it comprehends or communicates to any particular interest.

This effect is magnified by the more prominent response of academic inquiry to remove itself further and further from everyday life and actual politics. Putting political inquiry into professional disciplines and bureaucratic institutions gives it a momentum independent of politics. Gunnell recognizes the novelty of regarding academia as the central site for political theory, and he emphasizes the ways in which this has alienated theory from practice. Political inquiry proceeds in obscurely academic terms of methods, statistics, philosophies, and histories rather than accessibly political terms of anecdotes, images, myths, and rhetorics. It develops select audiences of academics, bureaucrats, and (sometimes) politicians rather than activists and citizens. It cultivates esoteric topics that ignore pressing issues or engineering projects that dictate answers rather than persuasive contributions

to public discussions of what should be done. Gunnell does not reject these choices as much as he pleads for the conscious consideration of them. His writing encourages us to think constructively about whose terms of experience should guide our work, when, and why. The same is true for our need to reflect on whose politics and whose experience configure our political inquiry. Until we address these issues, the disparity between political theory and politics will only grow greater.

AUTONOMY

They have nothing to do with each other—and this is called “objectivity”!
—Friedrich Nietzsche¹⁸

The positive sides of this disparity are expressed in Gunnell's distinction among levels of action and inquiry. The thinking about the politics that transpire within political practices may be called first-order political theory, if one insists on the reflective conduct of politics. The academic study of substantive political issues—such as election rules, housing policies, nuclear arms, and women's rights—is then second-order political theory. Since Gunnell takes pains to stress how little academic inquiry of any kind has recently involved actual politics, he sometimes insists on a fairly strict distinction between politics and all orders of theory. In that mood, he reserves the designation of first-order theory for such substantive studies of politics. He is especially inclined toward this terminology when resisting the claims of some academic theorists that their writings constitute a practically engaged and potentially effective *praxis*, Marxian or otherwise. Yet his points about the alienation of political theory make better sense if we follow the former classification and reserve the first order of theorizing to political actors.

On balance, Gunnell believes that social-scientific research has more often been lodged at the second level of substantive theory than has humanistic inquiry into politics. Despite their instrumentalist ideas of theory as a mere tool of research, avowedly scientific students of politics have come closer to addressing the real world of politics than have their humanistic counterparts. But even then, their second-order studies do not arise within politics or make direct contributions to it. Given Gunnell's concern to avoid the subjugation of politics to scholarship, this separation may be a good thing. He certainly wants to celebrate the autonomy of politics, protecting it from academic supervision or any other intrusion. From his perspective, however, neither scientists nor humanists do much substantive inquiry into politics. They seldom address the ontology of

political action; instead, they become enmeshed in kinds of theory even more distant from politics.

Currently, most political inquiry is, at best, political theory of the third order. (Again, Gunnell has not been utterly consistent in terminology, but precise orders are less important for our purposes than basic ideas.) Third-order theory easily becomes engrossed in methodological preliminaries which become an end in themselves, so that it never returns to the study of politics. In addition, third-order theory often metamorphoses into substitutes for real political phenomena and issues. For example, this is Gunnell's view of most work in analytical philosophy that purports to be about politics. My favorite instances include analytical treatments of abortion, affirmative action, and human rights. Whether the discipline is philosophy or political science, such theory typically covers almost everything except the conventionally political dimensions of such issues—the dimensions that are often decisive.¹⁹

Some purportedly political inquiry leaves actual politics even farther behind. At best, the philosophical and epistemological preoccupations of metaethics and metascience are political theories of the fourth order. More often, they are not *political* theories at all. Gunnell argues that the main reason to engage in such metatheory is to undo the metatheory of others. This may help to return theorists to substantive studies of politics. Abstract stipulations of value and formal logics of inquiry can never furnish a groundwork for political inquiry, let alone political action. Occasionally, they may be genres of displaced political argument; but they retain ties to actual politics only in the work of true geniuses such as Socrates, Plato, Marx, or Mill. Usually, they become avenues for escaping political issues altogether or at least for avoiding responsible argument in support of personal positions recommended in the name of method.

These four orders of theory inform Gunnell's arguments about the alienation of theory from politics: the premier theme of his work to date. He traces the motives and techniques of theorists in transporting issues from lower to higher levels, thereby transforming them from questions within or about politics to controversies of metatheory that have little to do with politics. Along the way, he generates the other themes central to his work: the recovery of history in political science, the reconception of theory in political inquiry, and the autonomy of activity in substantive practices.

Theory is alienated from politics by the lure of the metamove; it promises a privileged position for addressing problems that arise on any particular level of inquiry or even action. Move to a higher order of inquiry, however, and previously intractable troubles become problems capable of solution. Translate troubles of practice into problems of theory, perplexities

of theory into issues of metatheory, and difficulties of metatheory into matters of epistemology. Then return triumphantly to the lower levels by application of the higher-level answers. Particular questions are subsumed under general ones; and the rule of inquiry or action is top-down, authoritarian: abstract and answer, apply and control. This metastrategy is the modern equivalent of Archimedes' standpoint to move the world.

Sometimes we invert the imagery, turning height to depth. Then the strategy is back-to-basics, seeking the sources of the issues. Reduce practice to theory, and theory to metatheory. Analyze each problem into component parts that can be answered better because they are severed from confusing contexts. By metarules of methodology, brick the answers into a tower of knowledge and power. Build a better foundation, and the world will beat a path to your door.

Gunnell has become a foremost critic of such foundationalism. "Trees have roots, houses have foundations, and syllogisms have major premises. Does this tell us anything at all about knowledge or value?"²⁰ In fact, Gunnell maintains that it tells us only how to avoid or pervert substantive issues of knowledge and value. It leads away from the actual concerns of action and theory into wonderlands of metatheory so far removed from politics that we have a hard time getting back again, and so entrancing that we seldom try. When occasionally we do return, we bring dictates harmful to action and inquiry. These we impose as rules of inquiry from a philosophy made king over academic disciplines, which in turn seem ever more inclined to offer expert solutions for political problems. Such alienated answers are either irrelevant or wrong when applied to actual issues of theory or politics.

Gunnell identifies at least four modalities of alienation. He sometimes calls them myths: of the given, of theory, of the tradition, and of the political. Each myth stems from foundationalism, encouraging theorists to raise the order of their inquiries and then to mistake the resulting meta-problems for more substantive issues. (The subsequent chapter "Destroying Political Theory in Order to Save It" explores each myth in detail.) In diverse ways, each misconceives politics and how to study it.

These myths also misrepresent the history of political inquiry. Indeed, they supplant that history, since academic studies of politics are as much alienated from their own pasts as from the political present. "Political Science's tendency to forget, or misinterpret, its own past and consequently to repeat that past is striking."²¹ Both the forgetfulness and the myths express the discipline's deficient sense of historicity. Accordingly, Gunnell's concern for the alienation of theory from politics leads directly into his project of recovering history in political science.

This project has two main parts: recovering accurate histories of political inquiry and generating adequate conceptions of history. First in rebutting behavioralism and then in reconceiving the history of political theory, Gunnell has challenged several widely accepted stories of how political science has developed as an academic discipline. For instance, he has dramatically revised conventional wisdom about the character of political science immediately prior to behavioralism. His work suggests that the behavioral revolution arose from already established doctrines of emotivism, positivism, and scientism—and thus that its criticisms of so-called traditional theory missed the mark almost entirely. Similarly, he has called into question the very existence of the historical tradition of theory that was projected in opposition to behavioralism.

Gunnell has gradually become one of the few political scientists who attends carefully to the history of the discipline. He repeatedly shows how poor comprehension of that history harms current projects of study. This concern connects with his criticism of the conceptions of time, history, and historicity that inform most theories of politics and society. His first book borrows from Ernst Cassirer and Martin Heidegger to explore the interplay between politics and time in several classics of political theory. More recently, he has addressed methodologies for writing the history of political theory. He cautions that J.G.A. Pocock, Quentin Skinner, and other “new historians of political theory” not only misunderstand the relationship between methodology and historiography but also base their positions on inadequate notions of historicity.

As in most of his work, Gunnell’s contribution here is less to pose his own idea of historicity than to expose troubles evident in the implicit ideas of others. Characteristically, the burden of his arguments is that our inquiry has been crippled by lack of adequate self-awareness and attention to major difficulties with our commitments. Thus, his published exchange with Pocock seeks to start, rather than complete, a reconsideration of recent assumptions about history and how to study it. Even his work on the history of political science is far more oriented toward discrediting prevalent approaches than providing convincing alternatives. As Ira Strauber says in a later chapter, Gunnell “unsettles settled expectations.” He is a fine critic in a time when criticism may address our pressing problems more directly than any necessarily subsequent reconstruction. Certainly, his efforts toward the recovery of history in political science have been more critical than constructive, but no less valuable for that.

The same force of criticism is discernible in Gunnell’s drive to reconceive theory in political inquiry. His main concern has been to demonstrate that “what political science requires in the present circumstances is not a theory of explanation but explanatory theories, and the latter are

not likely to be achieved through adherence to dubious philosophical blueprints."²² Beyond showing that philosophy of inquiry is no substitute for actual inquiry, Gunnell has contested the conceptions of theory central to most research programs in the social sciences. In political science, these include the notions of conceptual framework, deductive theory, empirical theory, normative theory, and traditional theory. His main positive contribution is the thesis previously summarized regarding the several orders or levels of theory. For the most part, though, his push toward the reconception of theory comes through criticizing current ideas of theory as perverse impositions of philosophy on diverse political inquiries that have no reason to meet its requirements.

Thus, the main impetus of Gunnell's third theme derives from his fourth: the autonomy of activity in substantive practices. Political practices must not be ruled by applications of political theory. Practices inquiry must not be directed by applications of philosophical epistemology. Gunnell's notion of a practice is similar to Alasdair MacIntyre's: "any coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realised in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and partially definitive of, that form of activity."²³ If practices are not wholly self-contained, they are at least independent of any need for external justification by other practices. Political actions need no direction or defense from second-order political theories. Nor do substantive studies of politics require methods or legitimations from higher-order metatheories.

This deeply contradicts the claims that social sciences have accepted since their inceptions. While it challenges the ruling claims of philosophy all the way back to Rene Descartes, it does not necessarily discredit the actual inquiries of social scientists. *A priori* methodologies are too abstract to determine the detailed conduct of substantive research, regardless of how hard theorists may try for utter subordination to metatheories. According to Gunnell, theories of inquiry simply cannot become theories in inquiry. Neither metatheories of politics nor philosophies of science are conceptions of political activities and institutions, let alone conceptions within political practices.

As suggested by Gunnell's notion of first-order theories of politics, which are theories within politics, practices include immanent capacities of reflection. Practices understand, regulate, and criticize themselves. This holds for scholarly practices as well as worldly ones. Hence, academic disciplines contain their own theories and standards of inquiry, appropriate to their own tasks and evolving with them.

In no field of disciplined inquiry is theory merely a matter of decision which precedes practice, let alone a decision based on the authority of a philosophical claim about practice. Theory and practice in inquiry are only analytically distinct, and theory emerges in the context of making and evaluating claims about the world, including claims about what a text says. Philosophy may factor out inquiry into theory, practice, method, and other categories and reassemble them in various ways in order to present a reconstruction of some mode of investigation, but this is not a recipe for the conduct of inquiry. Those who claim that they are offering a theory or method for the practice of the human sciences are almost always presenting a version of some philosophical account of inquiry in those fields.²⁴

Yet both humanistic and scientific scholars continue to kowtow before the foundational pretensions of philosophy. Partly to retrieve self-respect and partly because they know no better, these scholars then assert prescriptive powers of application to worldly practices—in politics, management, parenting, preaching, and so on.

CONTROVERSY

[R]efutation, not imitation, is often the sincerest form of flattery.

—Eric Foner²⁵

Gunnell traces these defects of self-understanding to mistaken views of science, philosophy, history, and politics. He endeavors to free the student of politics from despotisms of methodology, enchantments of meta-theory, objectivisms of tradition, and pretensions of public policy. In each area, his criticisms arise from respect for its actual or potential achievements as a set of autonomous practices. In each, his refutations are provoking important controversies about issues central to its future activities. And in each, the rebuttals elicited by Gunnell's arguments form an impressive testimony to their timeliness.

Although Gunnell has long been among the more telling critics of behavioral ideas of inquiry into politics, his objections have never been specific to political science, and his arguments have seldom been directed to the details of actual research. Instead, his work seeks to break the spell by which political scientists (among others) have been bound to follow the lead of philosophers in logic of inquiry. He argues that methodological arguments have little or no claim to rule the methods and judgments by which political and other scientists conduct their research. Autonomous, each substantive discipline must assert (and accept) responsibility for its own affairs, none of which are the effective business of philosophers.

Hence, Gunnell continually challenges the categories and standards that logicians of inquiry (whether inside or outside philosophy departments) tend to establish for the inquiry of others. For example, he shows how no philosophical warrant exists for compartmentalizing analytical, empirical, historical, and normative theories—of politics or anything else. He does not deny differences among the many projects so schematized. Following J.L. Austin, he argues instead that the differences are far too numerous, diverse, and shifting to be reduced to simple dichotomies between explanations and descriptions or facts and values.²⁶

Despite the usual rhetoric of political scientists, Gunnell reminds them of what they already know, at least tacitly: that these philosophical splits have little to do with the distinctions encouraged by the substance of their own studies. Further, he explains how their research categories could often be called political more than logical, because they (sometimes) are imported from the realm studied or (more commonly) are generated by struggles for professional advancement.²⁷ Gunnell defends what scientists actually (could) do in their autonomous disciplines, but he attacks what they have said (and done) as disciples of philosophy. Accordingly, his work has the potential to occasion controversy in all quarters.

This carries over into humanistic studies of politics, done either philosophically or historically. On the one hand, Gunnell is an astute translator of philosophy into terms more readily used in political theory of all sorts. A good reason to read Gunnell is that he brings together so many movements, schools, interests, and problems in philosophy. He is repeatedly one of the earliest and best at plumbing the implications of new and apparently esoteric developments in philosophy. He moves eclectically among European and Anglo-American philosophies of almost every kind. Likewise, Gunnell is an excellent historian of political inquiry, both scientific and humanistic. His work encompasses the full panoply of the field, especially in the confusion of riches represented by the recent resurgence of projects proclaiming themselves to be political theory. Both historically and philosophically, he extends himself to virtually all developments relevant to such theory; and this makes his work a fine framework for encountering the field.

On the other hand, Gunnell is hostile to philosophy in the forms prevalent for at least several centuries—and perhaps all the way back to Plato. In some respects, the same holds for his stance toward history. In both domains, opposition to foundationalism puts him into conflict with most recent work. His arguments about the alienation of academic inquiry from actual politics even lead Gunnell to a philosophical and historical challenge of the very category of theory, precisely as it has become pivotal to the self-conceptions of scientific and humanistic students of politics.²⁸

Thus, he manages to unsettle virtually all of his potential allies, humanistic as well as scientific. Even in rejecting details of his specific positions, however, refutations of Gunnell tend to accept many of his general perspectives. Therefore, the effect of his arguments is often to move others subtly but pervasively toward his standpoints—by rearranging their inspirations and inclinations rather than by persuading them in some more direct sense.

Striking examples of this abound in the rebuttals to Gunnell's attack on the myth of the tradition. He defines this myth as "the imposition on the framework of the classic works [roughly from Plato to Aristotle to Marx or even the present] of an elaborate dramatic story of the rise and fall of political theory and the implications of these events for the modern age."²⁹ Typically, critics set out to establish that Gunnell incorrectly states important aspects of the tradition or traditional theories, as well he may. Almost as often, they conclude by arguing that he virtually reinstates a version of the classic tradition, as indeed he does. Along the way, they slide so far toward his perspectives that they finish by faulting him more for finally contradicting his original case against the tradition than for putting it forward in the first place. Therefore, Gunnell is able to reply that the *ad hominem* arguments of his critics do not succeed; that even if he does return to the tradition, his case against it still stands and should make others more careful in their consideration of it.³⁰

Gunnell indicts the myth of the tradition as an issue in the history of political theory. He accuses those initiating the myth (to a modest degree) and those perpetuating it (to a much greater extent) of mistakes in historiography: The myth implies commonalities of intention, influence, and discourse that did not exist. His arguments, however, have the effect of returning theorists to the politics—far more than the history—of the tradition. His explorations of "the tradition" show how it is less an old and given fact of history than a recent artifact of politics performed as historiography. However ill-advised, executed, and emulated they may have been in doing so, the implication is that mythmakers such as Hannah Arendt, Leo Strauss, and Sheldon Wolin were at least writing about politics—if not acting in it—through their tales of the tradition. The question then concerns the quality of their politics far more than their history.

Gunnell politicizes the tradition in another way as well. He repeatedly implies that theorists in the traditional pantheon were addressing concerns of the moment as much as any timeless or perennial issues in a universe of discourse enduring through the centuries. If this is true despite the manifest differences of form and genre among traditional theorists, then there are many modes of inquiry and communication about politics. In fact, for the same reasons, there are presumably many modes of inquiry and communication within politics. Need they be different from the modes

outside politics? Here Gunnell invokes his three or four orders of theory. But displaced or even alienated as they sometimes are, they remain by his own account of the tradition at least potentially political. Again the tacit point is how political our tradition may be. If Gunnell returns the reader to traditional political theory, then regardless of how "analytical" and "extrinsic" his own "retrospective reconstruction," the very idea of the tradition has become more actively political. For in the tradition as Gunnell transforms it, the theorist's "own and immediate concern is with his contemporary audience."³¹

Always Gunnell's concern is for doing what is intended as directly and successfully as possible. He brooks no substitutes and few detours, since they so typically become delusions. He despises the pretense into which we slip so smoothly that history or philosophy or epistemology of political theory is political theory proper (of the second order). Too often and too easily, would-be theorists study theory from a distance rather than do it directly from within. From there, only a small twist of further arrogance or confusion is needed to pretend that would-be theory is actually—and at last, fundamentally—action within politics.

IRONY

Irony originated . . . in a kind of deception characterized by dissimulation and evasion. The term Eironeia was applied to the manner of speech and to the practice of a stock character of early Greek comedy, who was known as the Eiron. His natural antagonist was another stock figure who was known as the Alazon, and whose distinguishing traits were boastfulness, pride, and deception through exaggeration. The Eiron was an underdog—small and frail, but sly and resourceful. The Alazon was a bully. The Eiron regularly triumphed.

—Haakon Chevalier³²

However cogent his history and whatever the worth of his philosophical positions, Gunnell surely confronts academic students of politics with one of their dearest and most dubious hopes: to be in politics without being of it. The postmodern multiversity, even more than earlier colleges and academies, is meant to provide a protected space of action for professing politics without being perverted by it. Although Gunnell might want to rule this out, he seems thus far to insist only that it be kept responsible. At a minimum, this requires that it be kept self-conscious by professors and students, that it be recognized by society as alienated politics, at best, and that it stay separate from and subordinate to the prior mission of scholarship. That Gunnell's favorite theorist and methodologist seems to

be Max Weber can come as no surprise, for he too saw politics and science as mostly incompatible vocations.³³

To read Gunnell, it helps to know that his professional years as a political theorist have been devoted to teaching in the Graduate School of Public Affairs in the Rockefeller College of the State University of New York at Albany. That school often sees itself as turning academic inquiry and instruction toward advising officials in government and training experts on public policy. Before becoming a political theorist, Gunnell aided Jesse Unruh, then Speaker of the California legislature and now famous for the adage that "money is the mother's milk of politics." Gunnell gained his doctoral degree at Berkeley, when Wolin taught there and while the battle between behavioral science and traditional theory was joined most ferociously. In short, Gunnell has experienced many of his subjects at close quarters. And at times, he seems to confront them as an *Eiron*.

"A frequent manifestation of the Irony of Socrates was the trick, in controversy, of appearing to agree with his opponents and thereupon reducing their view to absurdity, revealing by a strictly logical analysis the incongruity of such a belief with more fundamental views or premises which they themselves admitted."³⁴ Gunnell's irony is more often the opposite. He appears to disagree with his opponents. By a stringently logical analysis, he reveals the incongruity of their claims with more fundamental principles from their philosophies. But then he reduces all that philosophical argument to absurdity or at least a sideshow, by pointing toward agreements in practice that are capable of emerging among all the antagonists.

Thus Gunnell makes telling criticisms of both traditional and scientific conceptions of political theory. He shows how traditional theorists are mired in the myth of the tradition, the temptations of metatheory, and a transcendentalism of politics. He explains where scientific theorists are misled by the myth of the given, the temptations of methodology, and a transcendentalism of epistemology. He convincingly decries the alienation of political inquiry from substantive political theory and actual political practice.

Yet Gunnell's own criticisms are alienated and metatheoretical, while his alternatives tend to be insubstantial or transcendental. He seldom engages the actual practices of traditional or scientific theorists of politics, even though his prime principle of criticism requires it. He sometimes misses their political inspiration or significance, even though his main argument implies it. Thus, he strangely denies in deed what he enjoins in word, producing positions which are strikingly paradoxical and theories which are possibly self-destructive. Not all of Gunnell's agreements in practice with his antagonists are good.

The obvious and exasperating limit to his work is to fail its own challenge of substantive inquiry into politics. Unremittingly, it remains metatheory; and I see no sign that it will change in the near future, if at all. Of course, the metatheoretical turn of Gunnell's work accounts for its broad relevance across the discipline of political science and its deep influence within the field of political theory. No one can do everything; and if Gunnell can cajole other theorists to return their attention more skillfully to politics, he will have succeeded mightily. For good and ill, he suggests, scholars are not intellectuals; and not all of his agreements in practice with his antagonists are bad.

At his best, Gunnell may be read as a deconstructor of political theory. Thus in my later chapter in this book, I argue that he attempts a rhetorical turn on Western studies of politics. Subtly, maybe unself-consciously, he aims at freeing politics and theory from their current troubles: from tyrannies of fact and tradition, from temptations of metatheory and methodology, from transcendentalisms of politics and epistemology. He tries to turn old terms and commitments against themselves, not so much to construct new categories and positions by himself as to create room for others to reconceive their situations and selves. This accounts for the great value of Gunnell's arguments, their contradictions of form and content notwithstanding.

In a sense, to show this is to deconstruct Gunnell's theory of political theory, primarily in order to save it from self-destruction. In turn, that allows a reconstruction of his project in terms more adequately political and openly rhetorical. Gunnell's deconstructions turn on myth. Despite his early understanding of myths as systems of symbols, his later writing treats myths as systems of mistakes. By representing Gunnell's criticisms in terms of the symbolical sense of myth, his attempt to turn on political inquiry might be made more correct and effective. Similarly, by representing his counterproposals as a rhetorical remaking of these myths, his attempt to transform political inquiry might become more creative and persuasive. This would converge with his insistence that, necessarily and "maybe quite correctly," politics "is grounded in appearance and illusion. It rests on convention and myth; and no matter how open or democratic the society, it cannot tolerate pure tolerance or conduct politics without lying."³⁵

Gunnell himself compares this posture to Plato's in the *Republic*, the work that made immortal the ironic Socrates. "Using often the technique of the Ironic will, it was as the Ironic spectator that [Socrates] really functioned. He was but one of the prisoners in the cave of his famous figure. But the difference between him and most of the men of Athens was that whereas they took the moving forms upon the wall for reality, he knew these to be only shadows."³⁶ Gunnell shares that daemon of

illusion and pursues for political theory his own eironic quest for the wholeness and humility of self-awareness.

If the *Eiron* is fated to fall, the flaw that brings him down is an inclination to stay on the sidelines, merely mocking the mistakes and pretensions of others. "He began as the man who lies low beneath the jealous watch of the gods in contrast with the *Alazon* who challenges it. He ends up as the detached but not unsympathetic spectator of the drama . . . of human life."³⁷ This is the central temptation of Gunnell's work: to take the thesis of alienation as a warrant for making scholars into mere spectators, removed from political commitments and unwilling to put themselves on the line in times of trouble.

Yet in our times of democracy, at least, this is not a necessary fall. Then the *Eiron* may not be a Socratic hero, but he may still be a successful theorist. "It was his ingenuity that created the situation, and his skill in dissembling his knowledge and his powers that brought him success."³⁸ In ways that may surprise those who have not known his work, a good part of the future of political theory may lie in the issues of an *Eiron* from Albany. This is how and why to read John Gunnell.

Notes

1. George Steiner, "The Cleric of Reason," *New Yorker*, 56, 42, December 8, 1980, 158-195, on 183.
2. See: Robert Booth Fowler, "Does Political Theory Have a Future?," *What Should Political Theory Be Now?*, Albany, State University of New York Press, 1983, 549-580.
3. I use the phrase "postmodern multiversity" in a strict sense to evoke the institutions and ethos of higher education in advanced industrial and politically pluralistic societies of the last half of the twentieth century. The former word is my own, and its meaning is detailed in several of my essays on recent political theory. The latter word is Clark Kerr's, and its meaning is explained in: *The Uses of the University*, New York, Harper and Row, 1963; "What We Might Learn from the Climacteric," *Daedalus*, 104, 1, Winter, 1975, 1-7. Also see: John G. Gunnell, "Knowledge and Politics," Distinguished Research Address, Rockefeller College, State University of New York, Albany, NY, 1983, 42; John S. Nelson, "Politics of Inquiry: Poetics, Ethics, and Rhetorics of Research in Postmodern Multiversities," *The Rhetoric of the Human Sciences*, Nelson, Allan Megill, and Donald N. McCloskey, eds., Madison, University of Wisconsin Press, 1986, forthcoming.
4. Steiner, "The Cleric of Reason," 183.
5. PT, 160.

6. Haakon M. Chevalier, *The Ironic Temper*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1932, 44.
7. Michael Walzer, *Radical Principles*, New York, Basic Books, 1980, 4.
8. PPhT. Also see: TCD; DSCT.
9. PSPI. Also see: SSPR; ICF; DESSI; SPS; PICA; PPS; BPP.
10. PT. Also see: MMST; IHPT.
11. See: PSPT; PhPT; ETK; ISPO; PTES; BPP.
12. PTES, 4.
13. PT, 161.
14. PT.
15. PT, 160.
16. Gunnell, "Knowledge and Politics," 9.
17. *Ibid.* 10.
18. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Use and Abuse of History*, Adrian Collins, trans., Indianapolis, Bobbs-Merrill, 1957, 40.
19. On abortion, see: Philip Abbott, "Philosophers and the Abortion Question," *Political Theory*, 6, 3, August, 1978, 313-335; Amy Gutmann, "Moral Philosophy and Political Problems," *Political Theory*, 10, 1, February, 1982, 33-47. On affirmative action, see: Alan H. Goldman, *Justice and Reverse Discrimination*, Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press, 1979; Lane Davis, "Review (of the Goldman book)," *American Political Science Review*, 74, 2, June, 1980, 478-479. On human rights, see: John S. Nelson, *Recognizing Rights of Groups and Communities*, forthcoming.
20. ISPO, 25.
21. PT, 13.
22. PSPI, 115.
23. Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, Notre Dame, IN, University of Notre Dame Press, 1981, 175. MacIntyre adds that a practice will have "the result that human powers to achieve excellence, and human conceptions of the ends and goods involved, are systematically extended." (*Ibid.*) Gunnell might accept this requirement, but it does not seem necessary to his main arguments about practices.
24. PSPI, 124.
25. Eric Foner, "The Slaveholder as Factory Owner," *New York Times Book Review*, 87, 21, May 23, 1982, 11, 26-27, on 27.
26. For example, see: PSPI, 237ff.
27. PTES, 38.

28. ISPO, 27-31, *passim*.
29. PT, xx.
30. See Gunnell's reply to critics in this volume.
31. Friedrich Solmsen, "Introduction," *The Rhetoric and the Poetics of Aristotle*, Solmsen, ed., New York, Random House, 1954, xii.
32. Chevalier, *The Ironic Temper*, 40.
33. For example, see: ISPO, 27; Max Weber, "Politics as a Vocation" and "Science as a Vocation," *From Max Weber*, H.H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills, eds. and trans., New York, Oxford University Press, 1946, 77-128 and 129-156.
34. Chevalier, *The Ironic Temper*, 44.
35. Gunnell, "Knowledge and Politics," 11. Compare: PT, 156-159.
36. Chevalier, *The Ironic Temper*, 44-45.
37. J.A.K. Thomson, *Irony*, Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1927, 163.
38. Chevalier, *The Ironic Temper*, 40.

CHAPTER II

*Political Theory, History, and Myth: A Salute to John Gunnell**

J.G.A. POCOCK

A salute was a discharge of cannon, loaded with powder but not with shot and fired by one early modern ship on encountering another in waters where each had legitimate business. It might convey a greeting, a warning, or a challenge. Sometimes it took the form of a non-verbal demand for the weather station or for recognition of some sovereign's control of the seas; and on these occasions, there might follow war or an extension of maritime law and civilized relations. It is in this spirit that I offer this essay as a salute to John G. Gunnell's *Political Theory; Tradition and Interpretation*. His ship and that which I help to navigate are not on collision courses, but there seems to be need for improved understanding, both of the seas which we are exploring and of the nature of our enterprises there. The ordinance which I shall discharge in his direction is therefore loaded with powder to draw his attention—and set him a few navigational problems—but not with ball to sink him. His book is to be welcomed, but it calls for clarification of several areas of our shared (if not exactly common) concerns.

Gunnell describes his book as “an introduction to the history of political theory”¹ but this formula is not to be read in any simple sense. He informs us that he is employing the term “political theory” as a *via media* between the extremes of “political philosophy” (too narrow) and “political thought” (too broad), but we must wait for his concluding chapter to discover the very special sense in which he declares and explains his

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decision to use the term "theory." As for "introduction" and "history," his book is certainly not an introductory account of any "history" through which "political theory" may be said to have passed; he is indeed concerned to deny the validity of "histories" written upon this model. His theme—to put it in another way—is not historiography but historicity;² he is inquiring into the kind of historicity which political theory may be said to possess, and the best means of studying and responding to it. One may wish he did not use the tactic of declaring that the student of "history" is studying historicity without realizing it, and in consequence failing to appreciate it either; it is a little too easy to win with double-headed pennies like this. But the problem of historicity is a legitimate one, and Gunnell has some important and fascinating things to say about it.

His book consists of a series of debates between Gunnell himself and three groups of writers who have written history of political thought in ways which, in his interpretation, fail to deal adequately with the nature of historicity. The first, and remotest, of these groups is itself divided along adversary lines. It consists of (a) a sequence of American scholars—Merriam, Dunning, Gettell, and Sabine—who in an older day wrote histories of political theory along canonical and progressive lines, arranging classical texts in a historical and sometimes evolutionary order; (b) David Easton, who on a well-remembered occasion³ deplored their work as tending to substitute the history of political theory for political theory itself—a substitution to which he applied the epithet "historicism." Easton was anxious to establish clear-cut distinctions between the theory of "what is" and "what has been." He may therefore rank among the authors of that three-horned distinction between "empirical," "normative" and "historical," which for some years was malevolently imposed upon the study of theory by the American Political Science Association. *Triceratops*, however, was a dinosaur; and Gunnell rightly considers this controversy extinct. His purpose in depicting this first group is twofold. The Merriam-Sabine succession maintained the notion of a continuous evolution of political theory, to which the word "tradition" may be loosely applied; and they may be criticized as responsible for the looseness of this terminology. It is curious and significant, however, that Gunnell comes to their defense against critics who want history of theory written along lines more rigorous than theirs, from which the notion of "tradition" might well be excluded. The function of Easton in Gunnell's scheme seems to be that his use of the term "historicism," coupled with his espousal (at that time) of a modified behavioralism, serves to introduce the idea of a subversion of classical political theory by the converging forces of historicism and positivism, which is a principal them in the writings of the second group whom Gunnell confronts.

This group is by far the most significant in the structure of the book. Gunnell tells us that he was intellectually nurtured upon the writings of those who constitute it,⁴ and we may look on his present work as the affirmation of his independence. It is said to consist of Leo Strauss, Eric Voegelin, Hannah Arendt, and Sheldon Wolin; and what these powerful and diverse minds have in common is that they all in various ways affirm "the myth of the tradition," the need to escape from which is Gunnell's true subject. Needless to say, to explore any of these authors in depth would be to emphasize the ways in which they develop independently of one another; Gunnell is fully aware of this and cannot be accused of trying to reduce them to a common pattern. His purpose is only to focus on something which they have in common, and this is "the myth of the tradition": the myth, that is, that there existed from Athenian times into the modern period a grand classical tradition of political theory, in which the human ability to impose theoretical and practical order upon the cosmos was held to depend upon political life and the philosophic vision of political life. Gunnell is by no means concerned to attack this anthropology as such; his attack is directed against the idea that it was embodied in a tradition, of such unity and continuity that it may serve as a framework within which to order the history of political theory. All of the four mythmakers—as this group may occasionally be termed—in their several ways saw the continuity of thought of this order as centrally important to the history of Western thinking. They presented every major political theorist as concerned to maintain and elaborate it, down to an era—variously dated between Machiavelli and Marx—when a decisive breach with "the great tradition" was held to have occurred. Thereafter, the historical scheme into which every theorist must be integrated was that of a cumulative regression from classical politics. Man was ejected from the city, in which human nature could be contemplated as primarily political, and left as the inhabitant of a social and historical universe, in which human behavior was studied by the methods of empirical science and human consciousness studied as that of a moment in the historical flux.

Gunnell assails the embodiment of this familiar paradigm in a historical interpretation built around the notion of "tradition," by terming this "myth," he signalizes his belief that it is historically false and entails a false notion of historicity. Though his thought by no means comes to an end with the employment of these terms, it is clear that we must understand Gunnell's use of the words "history," "historicity," and "historicism" if we are to comprehend his argument. Since he has chosen to confront not one but at least three groups of writers, in whom these words occur in a considerable diversity of senses, it is important that we complete the setting

of his stage and consider how the characters of his dialogue may be related to one another.

It is evident that there was a certain naiveté about Easton's application of "historicism" to the cautious and orthodox historical method of Sabine. Three of the four exponents of "tradition"—Strauss, Voegelin, and Arendt—wrote in fairly immediate reaction to the authentically radical historicism of Martin Heidegger, with which the older American historians had nothing whatever to do; and the idea of "tradition," as expounded at any rate by Strauss, was an attempt to provide philosophy with a history that historicism could not subvert. We are in fact looking at that entirely legitimate phenomenon, an intellectual immigration, in which ideas of European, German, and Jewish provenance became established in an American climate otherwise populated by empiricism, evolutionism, and other such Anglo-Saxon manifestations; and interesting tensions and cross-fertilizations arose as a result. All three philosophers, furthermore, were (as usually happens) profoundly affected by the historicism they sought to repudiate. Though Strauss attacked "historicism" as a species of moral relativism—and his followers have been known to suppose that "historiography" is by its nature committed to the same goal—Gunnell is on good ground in discovering a kind of historicism latent in the concept of "tradition" itself. Voegelin is formally historicist in proclaiming that "the existence of man in political society is historical existence";⁵ and Strauss might not have disagreed, though he sometimes suggested (as does Gunnell) that historical discourse was not philosophically serious. Voegelin indeed advances into historiography, in the sense that he dramatizes history as a struggle between forces part symbolic and part occult; while for Arendt, human history consisted largely of a series of falls from the political ideal into lower states of being. What all this means for Gunnell—as he is well aware—is that the paradigm of "tradition" links, but does not unite, a formidably diverse series of attitudes towards "historicism" and "history" and that the concept of true "historicity" which he will put forward has to be measured against several nonidentical antitheses.

The scene is further complicated when Gunnell introduces his third group of antagonists. This consists essentially of John Dunn, Quentin Skinner, and the author of this essay (though other names could by now be added); and their common characteristic is that they accord an uncompromising priority to the study of political theory as a series of intellectual actions performed by a series of actors in a series of historical and political contexts. Their position is Rankean in the sense that they aim to depict political theory "as it actually happened," and Skinner has lately declared that we must "begin" to acquire "a history of political thought of a genuinely historical character."⁶ Since Gunnell is conducting "an introduction to the

history of political theory" and is prepared to use the phrase "the historian" to denote the exponents of "tradition"⁷, he is likely to find Skinner's language challenging; and, in addition, this group of writers are known for their insistence that the meaning of a text of political theory cannot be known unless we are able to reconstruct its character as a language performance carried out by its author and that there is a historical method which enables us to do this. Gunnell desires to take issue with these contentions, and to do so in the same context as his criticism of "the myth of the tradition." Since his third group emerges from a different intellectual culture, and has somewhat different presuppositions, from either the first or the second, there are liable to be certain difficulties attending the enterprise; and it may help to say something on this point before proceeding.

It so happens that all members of this group named by him—together with Peter Laslett, Duncan Forbes, John Wallace, and others—emerge from Cambridge; and their intellectual enterprise (if they share one) took shape in an environment neither American nor European. When Pocock and others expressed criticisms of an older school which attempted to write history of theory by erecting a canon into a tradition—one would expect Gunnell to be sympathetic here—they had in mind, not the sequence Merriam-Dunning-Gettell-Sabine, but the sequence Figgis-Gierke-McIlwain-Sabine-Barker, whom they looked upon as great historical scholars whose concept of history was now outmoded. The controversy occasioned by Easton's attack on the ascendancy of history over theory was not well known to them at the time, because the intellectual politics of American political science were not well known in Britain until Bernard Crick wrote a book on the subject.⁸ Nor was the reaction of Strauss, Voegelin, and Arendt against Heidegger a feature of their intellectual universe. What Karl Popper meant by "historicism"⁹ had more to do with Lenin than with Heidegger; and in general, the European intellectual immigration to Britain (Namier, Popper, Polanyi, Hayek) developed a theory of tradition more fluid, contextual, and Burkean than anything which Gunnell identifies as the "myth." Some elements of his "myth of tradition" may be detectable in Oakeshott's *On Human Conduct*, but the way in which Oakeshott elaborates the concept of tradition rightly keeps Gunnell from making him an actor in this dialogue. If British political theory has been little affected by German historicism (in other than Marxist forms), it has also been little affected by American behavioralism; only recently—by a strange cultural lag—has it been proposed (a proposal scarcely yet executed) to de-emphasize the study of history of theory in the British journal *Political Studies* on the grounds that this may be relegated to the American journal *Political Theory*.¹⁰ Consequently, there is no sense of a need to defend historical

philosophy against the converging forces of historicism and positivism. When Laslett started the *Philosophy, Politics and Society* series in 1956, the possibility that "political philosophy was dead," killed by logical positivism, did not seem to entail any need to defend historiography or to confront historicism, and the subsequent inclusion in the series of an article on the methodology of the history of political thought had nothing programmatic about it.¹¹ The Cambridge *historiens historisants*, committed first of all to the writing of history, are products of a British intellectual world in which that activity occasions no problems and never needs to be defended. It is only in America that the historian of political thought is constantly obliged to navigate between the many barking heads of behavioral science and the all-engulfing whirlpool of the "great tradition." British indifference to these perils may breed complacency and is sometimes the target of Anglophobic attack,¹² but Gunnell's third group has to be taken for what it is (to Gunnell a stumbling-block and to Easton foolishness). It does not emerge from the American intellectual debate in which its voices are presently being heard. This in no way incapacitates Gunnell from criticizing its position, but it does make it difficult for him to do so in the same context as his criticism of the "myth of tradition," or to distance himself and his concept of historicity from both groups at the same time.

Gunnell's criticism of the "myth" is to be found in his third chapter. To the present writer, it appears admirably carried out and by far the best thing in a book of which it is the center. He contends that the idea of a classical vision of politics has been imposed upon history in such a way as to generate a historical myth: an account of history paradoxically written for reasons themselves not historical. The author of such a myth takes as premise the perception—not in itself false—that a certain vision of politics, in which humans are political beings and politics their means of ordering their active and contemplative existence, can be located in classical antiquity but can be found only in various states of dilapidation in the period since the seventeenth century or thereabouts. The author of myth proceeds to depict the history of political theory as the movement from an "antiquity," in which this classical vision was maintained, to a "modernity" in which it has been negated and abandoned. There are two reasons why this is the crucial step to the making of a myth. In the first place, history is being written in terms dictated by an extra-historical ideal. "Antiquity" is defined simply in terms of maintenance of the classical vision; "modernity" in terms of its abandonment; "history" in terms of the movement from the one to the other. But in the second place—and the paradox lies here—the ideal is to be studied as it has existed and been negated in history; "the classical politics" is historicized and redefined as "the great tradition."

Gunnell lucidly explains how this is historical myth because it is reified idea. Like all such myths, it is not devoid of historical truth. Hobbes really did say that it was necessary to overthrow two thousand years of domination by Greek philosophy; there really was debate in the eighteenth century as to whether classical virtue remained possible in a commercial world; philosophers really were sometimes aware of one another as participants in a continuing dialogue. But such truths interest the authors of myth only in so far as they reinforce the image of an ideal history. The actors and agencies in great-tradition history are not chosen because they reveal the actuality of "historically discriminated patterns of persistence and change,"¹³ but because they momentarily actualize patterns of dialogue between ideal alternatives. What is going on, says Gunnell with the utmost accuracy, is not history, but "a historical drama";¹⁴ one, however, which is "reified and discussed as if it were a concrete and historically delimited activity in which individuals self-consciously addressed themselves to standard philosophical problems relating to the foundations of political life."¹⁵ It is not that historically visible individuals did not, quite frequently, do exactly this but that the author of myth is philosophically indifferent to the possibility that they might have been doing anything else, and therefore insists as a matter of historical fact either that they never did do anything else or that it does not matter if they did. In consequence, the mythmaker can typically see "moderns" only as taking those steps which led to the negation of the "great tradition," and can ascribe to them no motive for taking those steps other than the sinful and presumptuous (alternatively, the liberal and bourgeois) desire to take them. In the same way, actors in great-tradition drama are isolated in one another's company—Machiavelli must have been repudiating Aristotle, Locke must have been refuting Hobbes—because once the history of political thought is defined in terms of the dialogue with classical politics, all possibility that they might have been in dialogue with others, or taking part in other dialogues, is ruled out or reduced to triviality.

We now perceive the author of this myth as speaking with forked tongue. Since he is intent on an ideal reconstruction of history, he—I need not here apologize for the masculine pronoun, since Arendt is the least vulnerable of Gunnell's four to these criticisms—dismisses all attempt at a Rankean reconstruction, in which one might seek to discover what a theorist was *eigentlich* doing by situating him in a context not necessarily dictated by the ideal. Since his reconstruction is carried out for normative, moral, and sometimes religious purposes, he dismisses the Rankean enterprise as morally irresponsible if not subversive. Since the attempt to reduce classical politics to historical contingency, which he terms "historicism," was an important feature of the negation of classical politics by what he

terms "modernity," he may repudiate the Rankean reconstruction as "modern" and "historicist," though to say that theory can and must be reconstructed as history is not the same thing as to say that it has no meaning except as history. (We shall be returning to this point.) But the author of "the myth of tradition" is not only committed to saying that the concerns of theory and philosophy are not liable to historical reduction; he has also committed himself to saying that they determine the parameters within which debate is conducted in history and the history of debate proceeds. This is why he insists that debaters in history must have been taking part in the debate as he perceives it. He may denounce "historicism" in this sense of the term or in that, but his position is itself historicist in Popper's sense of the term, "preposterous" in a sense once used by Burke; he has extrapolated certain ideal attitudes from history and then affirmed that they control the course which history takes. Such, in Gunnell's view, is the consequence of the original error of reifying and historicizing the classical ideal in the form of a "great tradition." If you erect a historical myth, and insist that it is historically true, you will construct a mythical history and deny that this is what you have been doing. If you regard historiography as the enemy of philosophy, better not to get into historiography at all.

The foregoing paragraphs recapitulate Gunnell's third chapter; but the reader is urged to study the chapter itself, for it is remarkably well done. Gunnell does not actually apply the Popperian concept of "historicism"—that is the reviewer's gloss—but he accurately points out the existence of a historicist component at the heart of the Straussian scheme itself. The portrait of the mythmaker which I have just given is extrapolated even from Gunnell's extrapolations of a component variously present in Strauss, Voegelin, Arendt, and Wolin. In general, Arendt seems to have been most explicit, and therefore least vulnerable, in stating that her account of history (which she termed "storytelling") was "ideal," "metaphorical," and a "model";¹⁶ Voegelin, in his own prophetic manner, at least open in stating that the meaning of history was to be found in "theophanic events" taking place in a "metaxy" outside it.¹⁷ Strauss, with his magnificent effrontery, and Wolin, in a way which Gunnell makes appear most naive because least ambitious, are most liable to the charge of insisting that what happens ideally must therefore have happened in history. But all four display characteristics of the displaced mythopoeia—displaced because imposed upon history—which Gunnell has so lucidly diagnosed; and it is a delight to read his third chapter and think of the fury it will cause in certain quarters which richly deserve to be infuriated.

But perplexity sets in as we pass from the third chapter to the fourth. There is nothing in the former which a *historien historisant* from Cambridge will not desire to endorse very strongly. The contention that history ought

not to be reconstituted in exclusively ideal terms, and then passed off as history, not only recommends itself to one who thinks that there are Rankean means of reconstituting the history of the activity of political theory as it actually happened, but positively seems to imply, entail, and almost necessitate the existence of such means. Such a reader, faced with Gunnell's Chapter III, is apt to think that he has found an ally, as he is impelled to offer his own hearty and unreserved support; and the vigor with which he finds his offer spurned, and the existence of his method denied, in the course of Chapter IV, must therefore strike him, at a first and even a second reading, as a little perverse.

This is perhaps not quite fair as an account of the reader's experience, since Gunnell's criticisms of this third group of antagonists—Skinner, Dunn, and Pocock—have been initially stated in a section of Chapter I,¹⁸ before being resumed at large in Chapter IV. Yet the impression of perversity remains. For example, Gunnell observes that "recent criticism"—Skinner's and Pocock's—"of the historical integrity of much of the literature on the history of political theory has . . . failed to appreciate its actual character,"¹⁹ and proceeds to contend that the Merriam-Sabine succession wrote with a "practical" purpose, that of communicating lessons to the political science of their own day, and that this "intention" and "context" ought to have been taken into account in criticizing their work.²⁰ No doubt it would have been, had one been considering them as figures open to historical interpretation; but in fact, as mentioned earlier, the criticisms in question were directed against a rather different group of scholars and were confined to the contention that history of theory cannot be written as that of a dialogue between figures in a canonical tradition—a contention which Gunnell fully accepts and adopts in his third chapter. The Skinner-Pocock criticism may, however, be restated in the form: history cannot be adequately reconstituted by the needs which a practical purpose imposes; and this too Gunnell would seem to accept when the purpose is that of his makers of myth. He remarks of his "practical" historians that it is "ironic" that they should have been criticized by Easton for lack of practicality and by others for lack of historicity. Yet there is nothing particularly ironic about falling between two stools. All the "practical" writers he mentions wrote books announced or implied by their titles to be "histories of" political theory, and it was the essence of the criticism in question that "history of" this activity cannot be adequately written with either a "practical" purpose or a "canonical-traditional" arrangement of the subject-matter. Gunnell endorses both these contentions when criticizing the "myth of tradition"; so it is at this stage a little mysterious that he should earlier still have declared: "Those who attack past scholarship for its unhistorical character . . . find themselves left to rummage through the bones that once formed the skeleton

of the tradition.”²¹ One is more used to supposing that one has been trying to revitalize “tradition” as “history,” and to finding oneself immoderately attacked for doing so.²² Ironies seem to be arising at every turn; and not the least of them is that Gunnell, who supplies in Chapter III so excellent an account of how the history of political theory should *not* be written, appears to be maneuvering himself into the position that it should not be written *at all*. For further light on these perplexities, we must now turn to Chapter IV.

There was in the earlier criticism a curious passage in which Gunnell declared that Skinner, Dunn, and Pocock were in error in regarding the history of political theory as “a subfield of the history of ideas”²³—somewhat to the bewilderment of one of them at least, who (though he may use the phrase now and then) has no particular sense of “the history of ideas” as “a specific activity or discipline” and had supposed that he and others were treating the history of political thought as a history of linguistic performances carried out in linguistic, political, and historical contexts. In Chapter IV, this charge is taken up again, when Gunnell addresses Skinner’s contention that the meaning of a text cannot be sufficiently understood unless we can apprehend the author’s intention in writing it. It has to be said that Gunnell is not always consistent or clear about what the study of “intentions” is. He writes: “The likelihood, for example, of deciding whether Machiavelli’s *Prince* was a piece of advice for aspiring political entrepreneurs, a prototype of modern political science, a tactic for gaining a job, a plea for a leader to unify Italy, a satire to expose the politics of the age, or all of these at once, is very small, and it is not at all clear what would be gained by an academic consensus on such issues.”²⁴

Indeed not; and no serious historian of *The Prince* as an event in the life of the mind has concerned himself with such piddling questions for years past. The problem is that of reconstituting the acts of thought and speech, of reflection and articulation, contained in the text, as historical events, as acts performed by a man of whom something is known, in a political society of which something is known, at a moment and in a set of circumstances of which something is known. Gunnell is in fact fully aware that he must confront the question whether this is to be done or not. The passage just quoted is a subsidiary argument occurring outside his fourth chapter. But what he says there is that the members of his third group “retain at least the form of an argument based on the assumption that language represents or expresses mental states and that the study of language is to recover these states. They still study the language of the past in order to recount the history of *ideas*.”²⁵

The implication seems to be that an intention is the same thing as a mental state and a mental state the same thing as an idea, so that the

historical reconstitution of writers' intentions is the same thing as writing the history of ideas. None of this would be particularly acceptable to Dunn, Skinner, and Pocock, who have for years been saying that what they are trying to write is not the history of ideas but the history of political thought as a history of linguistic performances of speech acts. To follow the formulation preferred by the last-named of the three, the theorist finds himself surrounded by linguistic structures or paradigms—Gunnell is aware of the presence of Kuhnian theory in his antagonists but dismisses it with vaguely ominous adjectives such as "popular"²⁶ and "controversial"²⁷—and these tend to shape the theorist's language, and even his thoughts and intentions, towards stating and resolving certain problems in certain ways. However, it may happen that his behavior and action are disposed in ways not fully controlled by the paradigms and that tensions arise between what the paradigms make him want to say and what he otherwise wants to say; and it may further happen that important acts of theoretical articulation are born out of these tensions. Gunnell is wrong in supposing that a historian who follows this formulation assumes the intention to be "prior" to the language;²⁸ it is born of the tension between the theorist and a pre-existing and highly intentional language, and the outcome of this tension is to be found in what the theorist intentionally did in speech articulated by himself. In an earlier phase of debate over these matters, Dunn accused Pocock of forgetting that men used language, to which Pocock replied (privately) that it was equally true that language used men. Gunnell's accusation²⁹ that these historians neglect Foucault's position "that any distinction between language and thought is untenable" or Gadamer's position that "the speaker is really the instrument of language rather than language being a vehicle for a speaker's thought," is not likely to impress those at whom it is aimed.

I am still wrestling with the apparent perversity of Gunnell's determination to reject a historical method which seems to share so many of his aims and his adversaries. He more than once argues that, "despite their critique of their predecessors, recent historians persist in a search for what was crucial to earlier scholars, that is, the achievement of a canonical interpretation" and "wish to maintain the history of political theory as a distinct field of study organized around the classical texts."³⁰ This makes strange reading, if one has for years been engaged in struggle *against* the idea that the history of political thought can be reduced to a canon or organized around a succession of classical texts. One had imagined that one was opposed to the idea of a "great tradition," for reasons scarcely to be distinguished from Gunnell's excellent reasons for opposing it, and was endeavoring to substitute the idea of persisting and changing patterns of historical activity, in which the classical texts found such places as the

reconstitution of history assigned to them. One had grown used to being furiously assailed for one's presumption, one's subversiveness, or one's triviality in daring to depart from the classical canon; so that it is a new experience to find oneself accused of remaining imprisoned within it. Readers of *Political Theory* have had the opportunity³¹ of examining the uncharacteristic anger and contempt with which a brilliant student of political theory reacts when confronted with a work of theory more systematically established in its historical context than she cares to consider and with a scene of history populated by more intellectual actors than she chooses to respect. Shklar denounces work which confronts her with an "avalanche" of "insignificant" writers, who make matters worse for her by having been Englishmen. If we are not to dismiss this as sheer intellectual snobbery—which would be a pity in so fine a mind—we must discover some more or less intelligible grounds on which she dismisses her fellow-creatures as insignificant. Presumably the answer, in this case, is that they did not engage in the kind of signification which she thinks worth studying. They signified to each other, in their own language, in their own time, and about their own concerns; and the major theorist situated among them loses significance in proportion as he is discovered to have been part of the same action as his fellow political beings (Englishmen yet). Shklar is not an extra-historical interpreter, who demands to study a body of theory outside a historical setting; but she demands, perhaps, to be shown a history in which the evolution of ideas went forward at a level she considers "significant" (as apparently it did in France, but not in England). In Gunnell's terms, she is demanding a "great tradition," and it becomes the historian's duty to inform her that she can't have one; she must accept history the way it was, not the way she finds it "significant"—which at the last only means that she must share her ideas of "significance" with those of actors in the history itself.

All this, however, is easier to deal with than Gunnell's still mystifying insistence that to attempt to convert "tradition" into "history" has the effect of destroying "tradition" while leaving the "canon" intact and constricting. The same problem was raised in the title of an article by Gunnell's colleague Charles D. Tarlton—Gunnell testifies to the closeness of their collaboration³²—in which the Dunn-Skinner-Pocock position was characterized as "revisionism."³³ At least one of the targets of this criticism was at a loss to understand what he was supposed to be "revising"; but if what is coming out of Albany (where Gunnell and Tarlton both teach) is the contention that *historisant* history destroys tradition without adding anything to it, we may be nearer to understanding their language. It would be a very different criticism from Shklar's, since she complains of being asked to attend to figures who are not of the canon, whereas Gunnell (and

Tarlton?) declare that the historian is imprisoned within the canon; both can hardly be true at once. But this is the point at which to consider Gunnell's argument that the historians have mistaken the nature of historicity.

This begins with the contention that: "The problem that the type of argument advanced by Skinner and Pocock presents is not so much one of whether their method can be effectively employed as whether they provide an adequate account of historicity."³⁴ It is unfortunate that Gunnell has allowed himself to go beyond this entirely legitimate statement of what he thinks important to discuss, and suggest that because the Skinner-Pocock proposal entails questions about the nature of historicity, it is therefore "not a method at all"³⁵ and cannot be discussed—or presumably practiced—as such: "It is as futile to criticize their method as a procedural guide to historical interpretation as it is for them to advance it as such a guide."³⁶ The question about a method is surely whether it can be practiced: in this case, whether historical languages and speech-acts can be credibly reconstructed and made to yield accounts of what political theorists intended and achieved. If they can, they can. If the grasp of the "historicity" of such acts, or of political theories themselves, which this method permits, is philosophically inadequate, then we shall need a more adequate account of historicity and a method by which it may be apprehended; but this will not mean that the first method was not a method or that it did not do the work claimed for it. Gunnell seems to have permitted himself another double-headed penny.

Gunnell has, however, something important to say concerning an alternative version of "historicity." This he derives largely from the hermeneutic theories of Hans-Georg Gadamer, and it ought to be stated at once that the present essay will be concerned exclusively with Gadamer as presented by Gunnell and that the joint *persona* of "Gadamer-Gunnell" will occasionally be employed to dramatize this fact. Gadamer as a figure in his own right will not be under discussion. Gadamer as presented by Gunnell, then, contends "that the meaning of a text is never reducible to an author's intention and the context in which he wrote,"³⁷ because it is the nature of language articulated in a text to outlive its author and his context, and to bridge a series of gaps between the moment in which the author wrote and meant something and other moments in which the text must bear meanings not dependent on the author's intention. Consequently, "what is fixed in writing has detached itself from the contingency of its origin and its author and made itself free for new relationships."³⁸ The historian, of course, would say that this is precisely what he means by the "history" of a text—the process by which it escapes from the intention of its author and comes to bear meanings which are not those he intended;

but that it remains possible to reconstruct the author's intention from a study of text and context, and that the history of how "what the author meant" gave place to "what the text meant to its readers" cannot be adequately written unless provided with a starting point. He would probably add that the moment of a reader's uptake is to be historically reconstituted by essentially the same methods as those employed in reconstituting the moment of an author's intention. History, for this *historien historisant*, consists of a chain of individual moments, each to be grasped in its own finitude; the element of intelligible process is provided by the fact that it is possible to see how one moment gave way to another.

For Gadamer-Gunnell, however, history in this sense is inadequate both as an account of historicity and as a method of reading texts. The reader, who is "now," not "then," becomes assured of the text's plastic historicity, its abolition of the gap between one moment and another, and is at the same time assured of the similar historicity of his own being. He proceeds to read texts in search of "a genuine experience, i.e., an encounter with something that asserts itself as truth," a truth which "lies in what is said in them; and not in a meaning locked in the impotence of subjective particularity . . . not something that pertains to the speaker, but to what is spoken."³⁹ Text and reader are alike capable of transcending their historical finitude, and the "genuine experience" of encountering "truth" lies in the encounter between one transhistorical entity and another.

Now there is no need to complain that this presentation tends to make the text sacred or the reader godlike; such errors may happen but need not. Gadamer-Gunnell has found a perfectly acceptable way of advancing a contention which was familiar in the domain of literary criticism in the days of the well-wrought urn: that the reader may conduct his encounter with the text without troubling himself to reconstruct either its historicity or his own. He takes the text as it comes to him; he comes to the text as he is at the moment of encounter; and what emerges is art, or theory as art—the construction, out of the encounter between reader and text, of an immediate context in which he may legitimately take the text as making the statements which elicit the responses which it is appropriate in the context for him to make. This context will define the kind of "truth" being sought or discovered in the encounter. The reader may reinvent the text without regard to the meanings it may have conveyed in former historical moments; and he need not trouble himself about the historical contingency, conditioning, or finitude of his own acts in constituting the encounter. The owl of Minerva will take care of that for him; in the present, his concern is to mount with the wings of the eagle, seeking "an encounter with something that asserts itself as truth."

Gadamer-Gunnell, however, claims to have achieved not only the possibility of such an encounter but the possibility of a full and proper assertion of "historicity" which claims to escape, or transcend, or destroy—it is not yet clear which—"historiography" in the sense of any recovery of the past. The aim of the Gadamerian encounter is not to write history but to live it. (A Marxian tremor may be felt at this point.) It is part of this separation from historiography that the encounter must never be with the *mens auctoris*, if by that we mean the minds of a man once living but now dead and swept away from us by the stream of history, but with a text which survives and transcends him, existing independently of his intentions or those of anyone else (including the Gadamerian reader). But there is a problem here which Gunnell does not seem to have confronted satisfactorily. Let it be asserted that the historiographical enterprise is still possible: that the past context in which an author wrote can be reconstituted, that the experience, problem-situation and actions of an author in uttering a work of theory can be reconstructed in ways to which the formula "as it actually happened" is applicable. Let the *historien historisant* affirm that the encounter with history, in the sense of otherness and process, is still possible and forms part of the encounter with historicity and even of the Gadamerian "encounter with truth"; that if it is not part of this encounter, it still exists and possesses an independent validity.

It is unfortunate that Gunnell leaves us unclear as to his reply to assertions such as these. He indeed cites⁴⁰ the position of Paul Ricoeur, who is capable of imagining a text moving from a historical moment in which its meaning is that imparted by its author's effort to communicate with other men to subsequent moments in which it acquires from the encounter with other readers meanings independent of those at first existing. Gunnell, however, shakes his head, observing that such a hermeneutic "may not be reconcilable" or "compatible" with that of Gadamer. What he means is not easy to discover, partly because he now resorts once again to the argument that, if a method (Skinner's) raises philosophical problems, it is not a method and cannot be practiced as such. Unsurprisingly, this plunges him in difficulties concerning the relation of theory to practice, with which he wrestles in the ensuing pages, emerging (if at all) only with the suggestion that to claim the possibility of establishing propositions about conditions and events in the past is to burden historical knowledge with "the positivist representation of science as the application of method in attaining knowledge of objective facts."⁴¹ This, he suggests, is to confound the natural with the human sciences, which ought to be differently conducted; yet he is unhappy, even with Gadamer, when an attempt is made to separate the two sciences on grounds which assume the positivist character of the former.⁴² Whatever the problems may be which Gunnell is con-

fronting here, he has left unanswered the questions which must be raised once it is asserted that past meanings can be historically reconstructed. Does he mean that it is not possible to do this? That it is possible, but that we should not be doing it? That if we do it, we are doing something irrelevant to the practice of political theory? If Gunnell does not tell us, he leaves obscure the sense, if any, in which he thinks his validation of the Gadamerian encounter has rendered invalid the practice of Rankean historiography in the field of political theory. Yet the latter method will continue to be practiced and to make statements of which he will have to take some kind of account. To call the study of the past "dead," "impotent," "trivial," "sterile," "antiquarian," or "historicist"—all adjectives which occur here and there in his book—is not an answer to the questions that concern him.

In his fifth and concluding chapter, Gunnell sets forth his reasons for engaging in the study of the classic texts of political theory. He freely affirms that these are selective and personal; historicity (presumably a condition shared with others) notwithstanding, no one reader need bring to the Gadamerian encounter visions and dispositions identical with those brought by another. We are to have the fruits of Gunnell's encounters with a plurality of classical texts, or rather—since he offers us an account of what classical texts may be expected to have in common—the spirit distilled from a number of such encounters. And here it is that Gunnell's readers, especially those who have responded most eagerly to Chapter III, in which "the myth of the tradition" was reviewed and demolished, will undergo the most bewildering experience which this absorbing book has to offer. For what emerges in every case, with regard to Plato, Aristotle, Machiavelli, Hobbes, and the other great figures of the canon—here triumphantly reinstated—is a group portrait of the heroic practitioner of classical political theory, indistinguishable from the figures around which Strauss, Voegelin, Arendt, and Wolin were shown in Chapter III to have constructed their myths. The theorist is engaged with the problem of political order; he is an exponent of the *bios theoretikos*; he has witnessed the collapse of political order in his own times; he is concerned to reconstruct it in mind and art as a means to the reordering of the visible or conceptual cosmos; he sees the collapse of the ideal cosmos as a fall from order into history. Obligated to reconstruct the political and cosmic order in his own mind and art, he presents his vision in a literary form designed to reeducate the people; but since they are fallen from the philosophical and political state he must do so by means of myth and enchantment: "To a large extent, Marx's enchanting tales about the stages of society and the inevitability of a socialist community must be seen as precisely that, enchanting tales calculated to provide the basis of a new illusion but now one that is

intended to serve reason and save mankind.”⁴³ And the Straussian seal is set to the whole edifice when we read: “The careers of men such as Plato, Machiavelli, Hobbes, and Locke are marked by secrecy, craft, and other forms of dissembling which are employed to carry out what they conceive as their appointed task.”⁴⁴

Not a trick has been missed. The whole body of the myth of classical political philosophy has been reconstructed, with the sole exception of the myth that it constitutes a “tradition” or historical continuity; and since the last two pages of the book are concerned with reasons why classical theory is unlikely to recur in modern times, we cannot even be sure of that. Gunnell very frankly told us that his relation to the four makers of myth was one of *odi et amo*, and the enchanters seem to have claimed their changeling at the last. But as we sit, rubbing our eyes and trying to understand why so much of what was so satisfactorily demolished in Chapter III should have been reerected in Chapter V, there occurs a reversal of perspectives which reveals that in a sense we have been misinterpreting Gunnell all along. He rejects “the myth of tradition” less because it is myth than because it is tradition, less because it is pseudohistory than because it is history at all. For reasons we still do not quite know, he is unwilling to admit the dimension of history as otherness and change to the universe of political theory in any shape whatever. This is why he rejects Rankean historiography ever more decisively than the myth of tradition; this, probably, is why he insists that Ricoeur’s “ecumenical approach”⁴⁵ cannot be reconciled with Gadamer’s; this, certainly, is why he ends by reinstating the image of classical theory in every dimension except the traditional. His affirmation of the Gadamerian encounter as the only adequate expression of historicity was indeed intended to separate historicity and historiography. Man, he wishes us to understand, is free to engage in political theory, and free to affirm his own historicity, only when free to reconstitute history through the mode of the encounter, without any obligation to the historical finitude of either text or reader.

But the imposition of myth upon history, which he saw so clearly when writing Chapter III, is not so easily avoided. The pantheon (or *pantheotikon*) of heroic philosophers in Chapter V can be erected only because Gunnell can disregard the precept of Gadamer-Gunnell that the reader should frame his encounter with the text and not with the author. The *bios theoretikos* is lived by individuals, not by books, and Chapter V is a group portrait of the individuals said to have lived it. After encountering the text with, as he has told us, a complete disregard of the historicity of the author, Gunnell proceeds to reconstitute the author; and it follows inescapably enough that this author is the creation of his own text, reinvented by Gunnell in the course of the Gadamerian encounter. He

cannot therefore be a historical individual at all; he does not exist in history but in a "historical drama" (Gunnell's own phrase) of Gadamer-Gunnell's own poetic contriving. His "Machiavelli" bears that name exactly as does the character "Machiavelli" in Goethe's *Egmont*. In Chapter V, then, Gunnell is not writing history, but something akin to Platonic dialogue—Plato, after all, was the inventor of the technique or art form we are discussing—a series of encounters with beings who emanate from positions in political theory like Athena emerging from the head of Zeus.

Had Gunnell written Platonic dialogue, or had he found other means of making it clear that he was writing of or in that dimension of reality, there would have been no objection from the historian to his proceeding. But it is hard, with the best will in the world, to read Chapter V as governed by any such limiting definition. The theorists are said to have had "careers," which cannot simply be inferred from their texts and must have been lived outside them, in universes of which the texts were not the sole determinants. "Plato," "Machiavelli," and the rest are not solely the names of characters in philosophical dialogue but the names of individuals who are known to have existed in such universes, in historical moments and contexts which there are autonomous means of reconstructing. If Gunnell has moved from thinking there is no need to reconstruct the moment in order to understand the text to thinking he can reconstruct the moment exclusively out of his understanding of the text, he has committed the very error he castigated in "the myth of tradition," but it looks disturbingly as if this may have been happening. Perhaps the roots of the trouble lie where he insists that a method of writing history which entails an imperfect account of historicity is for that reason not a method or writing history. From that questionable premise, he goes on to develop the idea of the Gadamerian encounter, which is a method (will he permit the term?) of affirming historicity that denies the necessity of writing history at all. But it would seem to follow that such a method ought to abstain from writing history, and certainly that its supposedly superior apprehension of historicity gives it no special authority to do so. Gunnell may have slipped into believing that it does and so into repeating the errors of his predecessors; but what you can't say you can't say, and you can't classicize it either.

For all this, however, Gunnell's book marks an important advance and comes at a time when it should do great good. The indications of the moment—such as the coincidence of this volume with Skinner's historically rigorous *Foundations of Modern Political Thought*—are that political theorists and historians of political thought may be on collision course again and that a period of harsh words and angry misunderstandings may be upon us. It should be possible to avoid this unpleasantness by demonstrating

that the courses set do not in fact lead to collision, and to this end Gunnell has rendered two considerable services. He has provided an excellent rationale for the position—whether or not this need depend on Gadamerian hermeneutic—that the political theorist is wholly within his rights in simply taking up a text of political theory and reading it, letting it take what shape in his mind it will and his responses to it in terms of political theory be what they will. Historians of the Cambridge persuasion probably never said, or meant to say, that he should not do this, though they have sought to warn him that the text may contain words which so idiosyncratically convey the meaning of the original author that they will resist conversion into meaning anything else. The theorist at this point will be doing with the text only what the historian sees being done with it at every moment but one in its history—namely, reading it, as distinct from writing it—but there is no immediate need for the historian to remind the theorist of the historicity of what he is doing. The eagle has his noonday and the owl his dusk.

Secondly, Gunnell has provided—both by his precept in Chapter III and by what seems to be the failure of his example in Chapter V—an authoritative and unanswerable set of reasons why the reconstitution of texts in forms theoretically and philosophically satisfactory does not and cannot entail a corresponding reconstitution of the history of political thought as it actually happened. The text as the theorist reads it is not the same thing as the text as event, or part of an event, reconstituted by historians. If the historian must abstain from deconstructing the theorist's encounter, the theorist must abstain from trying to reconstruct history. Historical drama, if this art form is necessary, and ideal history must be kept rigorously apart from history. (Strauss on the Platonic dialogue is good on this.⁴⁶) If the two are combined, the result must be pseudohistory, myth-as-history, or Popperian historicism; and it will be hard for the historian to demolish these excrescences without seeming to discredit the theorist's encounter. Let owl and eagle, then, stay out of each other's flight paths.

Unfortunately—as Gunnell also reminds us—this is easier said than done. The text is, at one and the same time, an object that can be transhistorically encountered and an artifact whose history can be reconstructed; and it is impossible to exclude the presence of an author whose existence (since he is usually dead) is biased towards the world of history and away from that of encounter. (It is true that there are linguistic enthusiasts who want to abolish the individual in the presence of his own language, but they may be left to the just wrath of humanity.) For these and many other reasons, it is hard to talk about the text without talking about the author, or about languages without talking about societies; hard

to engage in a philosophical interpretation without implying some correspondent reconstruction of history. The moment this happens, the owl meets the eagle and feathers begin to fly. The theorist accuses the historian of telling him he can do his business only in a moment of historical contingency, while the historian accuses the theorist of passing off myth as history.

Gunnell's attempt (which I consider unsuccessful) to abolish "method" in favor of "theory" remains the only stumbling block here. When rejecting the position attributed to Ricoeur, he seemed to be saying that there could not be two ways ("methods") of viewing an entity in its historicity if the hermeneutical implications ("theory") of the two were incompatible.⁴⁷ This appears to lead to a rather extreme historicism, of the kind which often confusingly masquerades as antihistoricism: if the Gadamerian encounter is not merely *a* way, but *the only* way, of affirming one's historicity in the universe of texts, then the Rankean historiography of political theory simply cannot be written. The eagle now faces the unpalatable prospect of swallowing and digesting the owl; but we need not require this of him, if we can accept that Gadamerian encounter and Rankean historiography are equally and independently possible. At this point, they must return to the level of "methods," distinguishable ways of doing different things; and the tensions between them will become mere boundary disputes.

The imagery of owl and eagle suggests that theory is related to history as day to night, which is not a small difference; but at the level of method, it is possible to imagine exchanges of information between them. Thoughts that arise in the course of Gadamerian encounter may turn out to have been historical phenomena as well; meanings uncovered in the course of historical research may prove suggestive in the encounter. We may be able to discover literary devices and conventions for keeping dialogue and other ideal encounters distinct from history: one that may be recommended is a rigorous separation of "Hobbes says"—meaning "Hobbes means to me"—from "Hobbes said," meaning "Hobbes meant to say." So long as theorist and historian are doing different things, all methodological debate between them ought to be collusive. The problem becomes intimate only at the level where it is seen that you cannot do the one without doing the other; but day-and-night, yang-and-yin imagery may help us here. The historian can accept that theorists—some theorists, of whom Gunnell is the latest—are seeking to practice political theory on a transhistorical level, if the theorist will accept that the historian wants to show that all political theory, including this sort, is practiced in history; that the historian's prime aim is to show political theory as it happens in history; and that this is not only a way of studying political theory as phenomenon but a way of contributing to it as practice. Gunnell's book is about the historicity of

theory. History "as it actually happened" is not the whole of the problem of historicity, but it cannot be eliminated from it.

Notes

1. PT, xiv.
2. PT, 23, 103, 105.
3. David Easton, "The Decline of Modern Political Theory," *Journal of Politics*, 13, 1, February, 1951, 36-58.
4. PT, xi.
5. Eric Voegelin, quoted in PT, 41.
6. Quentin Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, in two volumes, 1978, vol. 1, xi.
7. PT, 84-90.
8. Bernard Crick, *The American Science of Politics*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1959.
9. Karl Popper, *The Poverty of Historicism*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1957.
10. *Political Studies*, 24, 2, June, 1976, 8.
11. J.G.A. Pocock, "The History of Political Thought: A Methodological Enquiry," *Philosophy, Politics and Society*, Second Series, Peter Laslett and W. G. Runciman, eds., Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1962, 183-202.
12. Judith N. Shklar, "Review," *Political Theory*, 6, 4, November, 1978, 558-561.
13. PT, 34.
14. PT, 70.
15. PT, 70.
16. PT, 79.
17. PT, 76.
18. PT, 23-24.
19. PT, 23.
20. PT, 97-98.
21. PT, xxii.
22. Shklar, "Review."
23. PT, 23-24.

24. PT, 132-133.
25. PT, 117.
26. PT, 82, 102.
27. PT, 84.
28. PT, 117.
29. PT, 117.
30. PT, 133. Cf. PT, xxii, quoted above.
31. Shklar, "Review."
32. PT, xii.
33. Charles D. Tarlton, "Historicity, Meaning, and Revisionism in the Study of Political Thought," *History and Theory*, 12, 3, 1973, 307-328.
34. PT, 102-103.
35. PT, 119.
36. PT, 103.
37. PT, 113.
38. Hans-Georg Gadamer, quoted in PT, 114.
39. Gadamer, quoted in PT, 118-119.
40. PT, 118-119.
41. PT, 121.
42. PT, 122.
43. PT, 157.
44. PT, 149.
45. PT, 119.
46. Leo Strauss, *The City and Man*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1978.
47. PT, 119.

CHAPTER III

History and Theory: Methodism Redivivus

SHELDON S. WOLIN

This is the age of method.

—Charles Sanders Peirce

I

If the spreading concern over the social, economic, political, and military consequences of contemporary science has given a hollow ring to Peirce's manifesto, recent developments in the study of political theory make it sound ironical. A little more than ten years ago, political theory criticized behavioral political scientists for their infatuation with certain versions of scientific method. The criticism was directed at the political and educational significance of the preoccupation with methods as well as with its implications for political inquiry. That critique was, at the same time, a justification of political theory in the face of widespread behavioralist arguments doubting its relevance to scientifically minded political scientists and calling for its elimination or reduction in the education of political scientists.

Today, however, much has changed. Now it is political theorists who seek justification by faith in method. Political theory is not criticized by behaviorists, but primarily by those who, by their own admission, trace their intellectual antecedents back to the theorists who had earlier engaged the behaviorists. In the name of method, even "autonomous method," political theory is rendered marginal by those who profess to teach its history. In much the same manner as the behaviorists of the 1950s, the possession of method is regarded as a mark of professionalism and, hence, of legitimacy. Professionalism is not only the assurance of status in the academy but a conception of the subject, of the methodizer as such.

Methodism represents a stage of self-consciousness in which the subject has become aware of his mental activity and is about to select a particular modality and the structure appropriate to it. As a methodist, he rejects modalities such as reflection or contemplation in favor of "research." He seeks to pattern his activity according to what he believes will make him a better researcher. The objectification of the subject is the outward expression of an inward turn, a truly Cartesian moment¹ when the mind is preoccupied with organizing its activity into operations. It is Cartesian also in the historical sense of being pre-Hegelian: for the subject conceives itself as autonomous, *cogito ergo investigo*, and hence it asks, what shall I do?—not what is shaping me?

The idea of methodology is a fairly recent one, typically, introduced as though it is a philosophical inquiry into the nature of explanation and the logic of investigation. In reality, however, methodology has been appropriated by the academic guardians of "fields" and "programs." As a consequence, it has lost its innocence. Methodology is importantly a mode of surveillance, legitimating and delegitimizing forms of mental activity and the political significations implied by them. The methodist regards the mind from a particular viewpoint, that of an inmate of an institution, "the academy." Accordingly, he parses the life of the mind to fit the table of organization of his institution. Typically, he does it without reflecting on the social and political determinants represented by the institution and transmitted by it, or without pondering their influence on his activity.

For reasons that have to do with the rapid incorporation of American universities into the larger system for the production of power and the exercise of social control, the methodist functions as the academic counterpart to the bureaucrat. He administers mental activity. This is expressed as concern about a "field" of "research," thereby giving rise to characteristic utterances such as "the rationale (for the study of the classic texts) is gone, and a philosophy of interpretation cannot supply a substantive disciplinary matrix and research programs."² The notion of "activity" also looms large in the methodist's vocabulary, signifying the domestication of action into routine and the conferral of legitimacy on the result. Activity is pronounced to be legitimate or "distinct" if it accords with certain stipulated rules or conventions; if it does not, it is dismissed as "pseudo-method."³ to follow a pseudo-method is to lack professional status, to be without a "field," the academic equivalent of statelessness. Thus, professionalism functions as an ideology and operates as a material force, for there are sanctions to ensure that those who gain entrance shall not stray and that those likely to stray shall not gain entrance. With control over curriculum, employment, and fellowships, the methodist can perform the equivalent of a naturalization

service. It constructs subjects, then certifies them as qualified for a place in the academic division of labor.

The essence of methodism is constraint by rules or conventions. The fetish of rules is the source of methodist's suspicion of theory. Theory signifies the mind's power: its potential for critical thinking; for achieving awareness and understanding of the manifold structures of constraint; for appraising their utility, necessity, and rightness; and for envisioning better alternatives. There is an incongruity in having a *Methodenstreit* at the center of political theory. It indicates that substance is being replaced by procedure, that the idea of the political has become blurred and meaningless, and that theory now appears not as controversial or even problematic but strange: a mode of mental being which those associated with it find increasingly difficult to relate to. The form of methodism's quarrel with political theory is indirect. It is the attempt to legislate the activity of doing "the history of political theory," to confine it by norms of legitimacy so that those who profess it will be inhibited from simultaneously practicing the real thing, that is, from turning the study of political theory into the practice of it. At bottom, the methodist is both antitheoretical and antipolitical, as resistant to doing theory politically as he is to engaging the political theoretically.

II

John Gunnell's recent study, *Political Theory: Tradition and Interpretation*, marked the beginning of the methodist's critique of political theory from within. The proper context for establishing the meaning of Gunnell's text is the one he used to situate his criticism of those he charges with having fabricated a "myth" about the existence of a tradition of political theory. The context is the so-called "behavioral revolution" which occurred, broadly speaking, from 1950 to 1970 and resulted in a marked transformation of the social and political sciences according to a positivist understanding of science. The mythmakers were, as Gunnell recognizes, participants, although in varying degrees, in the controversies of those years. Accordingly, their thinking was shaped by that experience.⁴ For Gunnell, however, the controversy is over and the issues laid to rest. He writes that "by the 1970s historians of political theory, for the most part, had withdrawn to practice their own activity The old debate about political theory seems to have subsided" because "public policy analysis" and "applied social science" now dominate the "understanding and evaluation of practical issues" while "the success of behavioralism in defining political science" has "undermined the influence" of the political theorists who disputed the claims made on behalf of the scientific study of politics.⁵ These "facts"

have rendered the controversy theoretically insignificant for Gunnell; even the terms of the behaviorist settlement and their possible implications occasion not the slightest theoretical curiosity on Gunnell's part.

One of the major issues provoked by the behaviorist revolution was whether political theory and the history of political theory were of any practical use to the education of political scientists or for their subsequent research activities. Gunnell accepts the conclusion of the vast majority of behaviorists, that political theory and the study of its history are mostly useless. He seems relieved that behaviorism has allowed them to continue undisturbed within the academy. Now that the controversies are over, he declares, the historical study of political theory needs no "special vindication." The irony of the situation is lost on him, as are the terms on which the historical study of political theory is allotted a place. It does not occur to him to ask, what are the political and social functions of the academy these days such that the history of political theory will be accepted if it surrenders some tendencies and adopts others? Disinclined to think in the political terms appropriate to a theorist, Gunnell unconsciously reproduces the apolitical, atheoretical terms for legitimating the historical study of political theories. It is, in Gunnell's description, an "academic field" of "teaching and research" and "commenting on historical texts." The meaning of texts and their historical contexts are the focus of activity. "Meaning" is an empty category in the formulation, but one point is perfectly clear: this activity will not be defined by a concern with the contemporary world or with the fate of the political within it. These "practical matters," which is Gunnell's bland synonym for politics, have been assigned to those whose specialty is "policy" questions. It is "possible," Gunnell notes cautiously, to "utilize" the texts to "explore" philosophical issues of politics, even to derive "insights" into "modern political practice" from them;⁶ but it is not necessary, urgent, or even desirable to do so.

In sum, when Gunnell writes that the old debates are "of diminishing consequence for both research and teaching" and that the resulting dissociation of the history of political theory from political science is reflected in "a certain turning inward on the part of the historians of political theory and a growing concern with the nature of their enterprise,"⁷ he is solemnizing the depoliticism of political theory and its transformation into an atheoretical subject.

These tendencies are implicit in the way Gunnell overlooks what is perhaps the most important thing to be said about the state of political theory during the first decade and a half of the behavioral revolution. This historical understanding of political theory was, for all practical purposes, the only major form in which political theory was being actively pursued in America. One should remember that, for a quarter of a century after

the end of World War II, English-speaking philosophers scarcely deigned to recognize political questions as a subject sufficiently worthy of philosophical attention. Something of the flavor of philosophical condescension has been preserved in the "Introduction" which Anthony Quinton wrote for a volume of essays on political philosophy.⁸ In recreating the times, one should note also that Marxism had just barely begun to stir among younger social and political theorists. It is not, therefore, a gross exaggeration to say that during these years the historical approach to political theory made a contribution to the perpetuation of political theory—even, if I may be permitted an aside, to the perpetuation of traditions of theory—that was not altogether negligible. Gunnell, who is reluctant to confront the question of theory, is nonetheless sure that I and the other targets of his criticism violated some standard of theorizing by using "the" history of political theory as a "surrogate" for the genuine article.⁹

Gunnell also understates (that is, mentions only to drop) what for me at least was the most theoretically important feature to the behavioral revolution, its ideological function on behalf of what many of its exponents called "the system." Whether, one agrees with this characterization, it was a vital element in the context in which my own views were developed. Stated more broadly and fully, these views about political theory, political science, and behavioralism were advanced as part of a political analysis aimed at trying to make theoretical sense of what many observers would agree was the most intensely political decade in American history since the Civil War. Gunnell severs the organic connection of my attempts at theorizing to my conception of the history of theory and then, *sin ira ac studio*, as Weber remarks of the ideal bureaucrat, says: "If academic political theory is to be practiced in a transhistorical, and even transcendental manner, I would prefer . . . that it generate its problems by at least starting from a consideration of the actual issues that gave rise to the classical texts and from a concern about the actual arguments they contain rather than subsuming both under categories derived from the conventions of an academic discipline."¹⁰ Leaving until later Gunnell's curious belief that "consideration of the actual issues that gave rise to the classical texts" and "a concern about the actual arguments" are not academic conventions, one is able to see from Gunnell's own practice the way methodology is insinuated as though it were some neutral arbiter deciding questions of intellectual propriety when its actuality is to marginalize critical political thinking, to prevent it from being what it has typically been among those who theorize.

Gunnell manages the double feat of criticizing four political theorists for being poor historians and the same four for being historians who practice theory ineptly. He achieves this by trading on a certain ambivalence

that begins with the title of his book, *Political Theory*, and persists throughout it. The book is and is not about political theory. Mostly, it is "an introduction to the history of political theory as a field of study."¹¹ In the course of his book, however, Gunnell frequently lectures political theorists, living as well as dead, about their practice of theory, berating them for improperly mixing history with theory, injecting present concerns into the past, and even with behaving abnormally. Political theorists are, of course, proper targets for criticism, but Gunnell's criticism is of a peculiar sort. It never engages theories as political theories. Indeed, the whole question of what a political theory is receives only the most cursory and formal examination by Gunnell. If any coherent discussion of the history of political theory is to be held, one should have some notion of what such a study would be a history of. One brief moment in *Political Theory* recognizes that perhaps theory has historically signified a mode of thought and possibly of action that has been only contingently related to philosophy; but Gunnell retreats from the implications of that insight almost at the same moment of discovery. After remarking, rightly, that placing all theorists under the category of "philosophy" would be historically inaccurate, he insists that this error was nonetheless productive because it understood correctly that the true "location" of political theory was "outside the realm of political action."¹²

Having depoliticized theory, all that remains is to formulate a conception of its history that effectively guts it of theoretical interest as well. Accordingly, he accepts unquestioningly the notion which identifies a theory with a "text;" and then he proceeds to compose the epitaph for the whole operation, describing texts as "artifacts that merit the concern of archaeologists of knowledge."¹³

This unwillingness to engage the idea of theory except as an object of "research" explains the oblique quality of the criticism developed in *Political Theory*. He lumps together a heterogeneous group of political theorists—Eric Voegelin, Leo Strauss, Hannah Arendt, and me¹⁴—and charges that each is or was in varying degrees guilty of having fabricated a myth, "the myth of the tradition." What is interesting about the charge is the way that Gunnell wavers in his formulation of it. In some passages, he indicts the four for having fostered a myth which has had, in his view, an unfortunate effect upon the study of the history of political theory. Thus:

They have substantially contributed to the belief that the basic object of study in the history of political theory is an inherited pattern of thought whose basic elements are discernible in the classic works of political literature extending from Plato to

the present, and that this tradition is the basic intellectual context for interpreting particular texts.¹⁵

Elsewhere, the indictment assumes a more general character, as though the issue were not history of political theory but the substance of certain recent theories. First, Gunnell states the point cautiously. After noting that the four writers use the "idea of tradition" as "a vehicle" for "a critical analysis of contemporary politics," he remarks that this has "led" to "the *myth of the tradition* or the imposition on the framework of the classic works of an elaborate dramatic story of the rise and fall of political theory and the implications of these events for the modern age."¹⁶ Later, Gunnell lays great emphasis on a "consensus" among the four that suggests that what really counts is the combination of concerns, some of which pertain to the study of the history of political theory, others to substantive matters. Thus, the consensus is said to include also "antipathy toward contemporary political and social science," "concern with the deficiencies of modern liberalism," "the existence and basic characteristics of the modern crisis," "the rise of the social over the political realm," and "the role of the historian as the transmitter and preserver of political wisdom and the remnant of political theory in the modern age."¹⁷

For Gunnell, the coupling that links mistakes about the history of political theory with the substantive issues inventoried above is the idea of tradition. This idea, according to Gunnell, was in fact an "analytical" reconstruction that attempted to masquerade as "an actual historical tradition."¹⁸ But Gunnell is not content to point out a confusion of logical and historical categories; he also contends that historical claims made on behalf of "the" tradition and its canonical texts are not warranted by historical and textual evidence. That he never pauses to examine any specific textual violation or historical misstatement may merely be noted in passing. More astonishing, Gunnell concedes virtually every major claim which I advanced as evidence of a tradition of discourse: "There is no doubt," he writes, that the classic theorists saw themselves as addressing universal themes and that "sometimes a similarity, and even a continuity, . . . was recognized by the theorists themselves;" that theorists "sometimes" recognized similarities with their predecessors and "occasionally" even argued with them; and that historical influences and connections can be found.¹⁹

Initially, one might have thought his vantage point was that of a historian of political theory intent upon correcting errors in his "field." In reality, Gunnell denies emphatically that the "field" exists. It is, he writes, "a category that encompasses a quite diverse body of literature rather than a designation for clearly circumscribed activity with generally accepted standards of judgment and procedures of analysis."²⁰ The non-

existence of the field does not deter Gunnell from criticizing others for practicing it badly. What is revealing are not Gunnell's inconsistencies but the reason for them. This is his failure to establish and observe a distinction between political theory and the history of political theory. The failure was inherent in Gunnell's project. His quarrel is with political theory, but it is expressed as an enterprise aimed at the clarification of the history of political theory. This misdirection is not accidental but congenital to the methodist's way of conducting the politics of theory. It begins with the first basic move in Gunnell's text, the selection of the four writers most notably associated with the idea of tradition. Gunnell confronts none of them on the plane which they defined and acted upon, the plane where theory attempts to engage and comprehend the political condition of its time. Instead, he extricates them from a context that was political and theoretical and inserts them into a different context, "the history of political theory." He proceeds to analyze each of them, not as political theorists who addressed themselves theoretically to what they considered to be the urgent and fundamental issues of their times, but as "four historians of political theory" who are primarily responsible for certain mistaken beliefs about the history of political theory.²¹

Although Gunnell professes to place great weight on the accurate reading of texts and of historical contexts, reasonable familiarity with the four writers in question should persuade a careful reader that none of them considered himself or herself primarily to be a historian or to be engaged in writing a history of political theory. For my own part, I stated categorically that *Politics and Vision* was not intended to be "a comprehensive and detailed history of political thought;" and I referred, instead, to a "historical approach" and a "historical perspective."²² As the book shows, the approach and perspective were directed toward the meaning of theory and of the political. It was, in other words, a historical approach to the practice of political theory. Gunnell frequently acknowledged that the four writers were actually preoccupied with something other than the history of political theory; but when he turns to redescribe their purposes, he does not get it wholly right. They had, he writes, "a profound concern with the present condition of political theory and the implications for both politics and the study of politics."²³ Speaking only for myself, this characterization has things importantly backwards. The condition of political theory and the study of it have seemed to me of secondary concern, important mainly as they bear on broader questions of education. Political theory doesn't have "implications" for politics; rather politics has implications for theory. In my formulation of some years ago, political theorizing is prompted not because something is wrong with theories about politics, but because something is fundamentally wrong in the political world.²⁴

Gunnell's misreading is, again, a matter of no great importance in itself. It is significant only as a sign of his profound suspicion of theorizing and his impulse to contain its politicality. This is revealed strikingly in some later comments made in response to Pocock's criticisms. There, unlike his book, Gunnell emphasizes a distinction between political theory and its history; but he does it in part by introducing a classification of theory which had figured dimly, if at all, in *Political Theory*. He offers something called "academic political theory," a classification he does not bother to explain or defend, although earlier he had taken great pains to emphasize that the conventions which demarcate a field of mental activity are derived either analytically or historically. His purpose, however, is clear: to depreciate the theories which presume—mistakenly, in Gunnell's view—to be political theories. Political theories, according to Gunnell's ignomic utterance, are "a dimension of political activity"—by whose convention is not made clear—while academic political theorists, such as Rawls and Habermas, only imagine that they are doing "order" political theory while at the same time claiming to be "extending a tradition of discourse . . . that was addressing the same concepts and problems." Such efforts, he writes,

with their implied contact with actual political problems and historical events seems largely illusory no matter how "political" or socially engaged its language or how evaluative and prescriptive its tone . . . Academic political theory, no matter how pretentious it often may be, is largely a second-order enterprise that involves writing *about* politics and political theory in a first-order sense.²⁵

Why is this so? The answer lies apparently in what Gunnell postulates as the nature of genuine or "first-order" political theory:

Not only does (academic political theory) fail to make contact with concrete political issues in any clearly demonstrative manner, but it abstracts from, and imposes upon, its putative predecessors such as Hobbes and Locke a set of philosophical motives and concerns that arise from an academic tradition and which distorts the actual character of the enterprise in which they were engaged and the political context in which they acted.²⁶

Gunnell furnishes no examples of the errors charged against academic political theories, nor does he specify what it would look like for them to have made "contact with concrete political issues" or why this would transform academic into real political theory or whether academic political theory is in principle incapable of such "contact" or merely that some of its exponents are. These are not niggling matters, especially the requirement that to qualify as first-order political theory, the theorist must make contact

with concrete issues. Gunnell has accomplished the feat of writing an entire book about "political theory" without ever once mentioning, let alone addressing, a single political issue of his day. At the same time, he lays the same charge, of lacking in concreteness, against me and the others, indicating that the fulfillment of this criterion was the distinguishing mark of the classical theorists. Essentially, it is a claim that our writing was lacking in political content, that it failed to engage concrete events in the "real world." It is a measure of Gunnell's political sensibility that he wrote an entire section on Hannah Arendt without making any mention whatsoever of her most political works: *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, *On Revolution*, and *On Violence*. Similarly, he ignores all of my political writings. These omissions do not lend much credibility to Gunnell's protestations about the importance of context in analyzing political theories or create much confidence in the political sensibility which governs his conception of theory or even myth and causes him to characterize Arendt's work as "therapeutic" politics.

Gunnell is accurate in saying that I look upon the history of political theory instrumentally. This is not only because I am unclear as to what it would mean to study the history of political theory for its own sake—which is one of the points where theory diverges from philosophy—but also because practically all political theories were intended to be used, some in more complex ways than others. This does not mean that one looks to past political theorists for solutions to present political problems. Gunnell attributes such a viewpoint to me but without advancing any evidence. There are, I believe, three primary reasons for studying past political theories. First, by reading them we acquire a basic vocabulary for thinking about and discussing political matters, and we acquire it in the context of rigorous and critical thought. Plainly, this is not the only way of becoming acquainted with political language. Second, familiarity with important theories helps to nurture a political sensibility, a notion that I tried to develop using Polanyi's idea of "tacit knowledge." The simplest way to describe such a sensibility is to say that, by possessing it, one is better able to grasp what is at stake when political controversies arise or choices have to be made or when one is trying to grasp the meaning of particular events. At stake is not a discrete policy question or decision but its implications for fundamental matters involving, among other things, the nature and quality of the collectivity, its being and well-being. Third, a political theory of the kind that has helped to shape the Western tradition of political thinking offers proof that political questions can be addressed theoretically, and it shows how demanding that undertaking can be.

This last point can be elaborated in order to underscore the significance of what I and some others, notably at Berkeley, were trying to do—without,

I trust, inflating its importance. The examples of theory that a tradition furnishes are not only an encouragement to undertake the task of thinking through the meaning of a social order, but the undertaking has a special resonance in America. Tocqueville long ago noted that Americans tend to neglect theory in favor of developing practical solutions, to which one can add that in this century the primacy of "fact" over theory has had a certain hegemonic force behind it. The seemingly indefinite increase in American political, military, and economic power, coupled with the rise in standards of living and in social welfare programs, made the category of fact seem the most convincing statement of the theory of America. At the same time, these developments also had the effect of rendering the concept of "the past" as bizarre and ungrateful or, at best, simply incomprehensible. Beginning with the civil rights movement of the early sixties and continuing through the opposition to the Vietnam War, the Watergate crisis, and now the Reagan presidency, theory and history no longer seem bizarre but threatening. During these troubled times, the idea that political theory could help citizens to think through their common condition, to follow out the interconnections between powerful social and political forces, and to recognize in a critical way what was happening to them culturally got established. Theory became something of a political and cultural force. Some of us also believed that questions concerning authority, justice, equality, liberty, law, participation, and, above all, power had been pondered by powerful theoretical minds of the past and that one of the ways to gain some insight into how to go about thinking about these problems, grasping the stakes involved, was to consult them—not for answers but for the demands such minds exacted if one were to engage politics theoretically. Communing with traditions is a way of being politically responsible.

In this context, the idea of historical mindedness as a condition of theorizing assumed a political rather than a professional or, *pace* Pocock, a Rankean understanding. It was, and remains, my contention that the dominant modes of power in contemporary America are antihistorical in their thrust and consequences. Capitalism produces workers and consumers by destroying inherited skills, patterns of life, communities and values. Contemporary technology and mass culture contribute to the same ends of divorcing persons and places from their pasts. The most respected and emulated form of knowledge, modern science, is profoundly antihistorical. It lives by superseding its own accomplishments. It is not accidental that the social science reputed to be the most scientific—economics—is also the least historically minded. To state the same point somewhat differently, in so-called traditional societies, "present" and "future" are viewed as dangerous categories, while in liberal, developing societies they are conservative categories, descriptive of the outlook of the dominant social groups. The

"past" represents a potential threat because it makes it possible to get outside the present, to escape, as it were, victimization by the present. The victimization occurs because dominant groups, through the medium of intellectuals and academics, are always pressing to control the categories of interpretation and to make the ones which are easily accessible consistent with the perceived requirements of governance. A case in point is the numerous ways in which establishment-supported intellectuals have tirelessly attacked the idea of democracy while at the same time cheapening it for propagandistic purposes.

This does not mean granting a license to ransack the past or past theories in search of ammunition for current controversies. As I wrote some years ago, "one reads past theories, not because they are familiar and therefore confirmative, but because they are strange and therefore provocative."²⁷ confronting strange or puzzling theories can cause one's own notions, and the world they represent, to appear problematic; they juxtapose the present with a different scheme of things, a different sensibility, a different experience. Because a considerable number of concepts have remained in constant, though varying, use over the centuries, understanding past theories is possible, although certainly not without substantial effort, as well as juxtaposing them with present concerns.

Predictably, Gunnell's criticisms about what he chooses to call my lack of "historicity" are primarily motivated by a concern to depoliticize the uses of history. "What is important," he declares, "is that the meaning of the past is not made to bear the burden of justifying critical judgments about politics and that the pretension of presenting the significance of all previous thought is avoided."²⁸ Presumably, the meaning of the past could tolerate the burden of justifying uncritical judgments about politics; or does Gunnell mean that the past cannot be used in any way to make judgments, critical or otherwise, about the present? Gunnell's confusion is the result of an inept effort to appropriate Gadamer's notion of historicity which is, of course, derived from Heidegger; but then when the chips are down, Gunnell reverts to an uncritical positivist conception of history. "I agree with Pocock," he testifies, "that showing how political theory actually happened in history," along with "close textual analysis," is "the best way to contribute to (the) practice" of political theory "both on the first- and second-order levels."²⁹ I must confess to not fully understand what Gunnell means by the phrase "showing how political theory actually happened in history;" nor, since he never explains the point, am I clear what he is claiming about the benefits of historical knowledge, other than the obvious clichés. Whatever it is, though, it is some distance removed from Gadamer and that Gadamer's actual position is nearer, both in spirit and substance, to the one I have been developing independently. One of Gadamer's main

points concerns the reflexivity of the inquiring subject who is not only trying to understand some aspect of the historical past but is also conscious of the historical character and locus of his own understanding. Historicity has to do with the convergence of the two, and the inquirer's contribution of his present is crucial.³⁰ It is as far removed in substance and spirit from Rankean positivism as it is from Gunnell's archaeological artifacts. Its basic notion is that we, as interpreters and users of the past, revitalize it with our concerns just as it historicizes those concerns of ours. Something of its essence was captured in a remark by Richard Hooker, the sixteenth-century Elizabethan divine, about the body politic as an immortal corporation: "we were alive in our predecessors and they do live in us still."

The politics of Gunnell's methodological criticisms has as its purpose to devalue political theory and its history by destroying the connections which had been established by the writers he singles out for attack. The history of political theory, which Gunnell insists never existed as a clearly defined activity conducted according to prescribed norms, will be replaced by a study of texts and historical contexts. As long as those who practice interpretation and the re-creation of historical contexts do not reintroduce talk about "a tradition" or canonical books, or believe that there is any convincing reason why certain works "deserve to be considered classics," or reconsider the meaning and consequences of political scientism, they will be assured of legitimacy. One qualification to the above prohibitions should be noted. Gunnell would suspend the taboo against reconsidering the behaviorist movement in order to encourage a more sympathetic attitude toward the suggestion of some behaviorists that the political theories of the past might be useful after all as a storehouse of testable (i.e., descriptive) hypotheses.³¹ The utilitarian view of "the tradition," Gunnell opines, is far healthier than the one of the mythmakers, who saw "the divination of the tradition as an apocalyptic issue and as the secret to the fate of Western civilization."³² Under the new dispensation, students and researchers are relieved of a special burden. There is "no requirement" that the texts they study "be relevant to a political problem." Since many of the texts are "literary masterpieces," they can be studied in the spirit of "archaeologists of knowledge." No harm will come of this activity, Gunnell assures us, as long as we do not believe that "the excavation of this tradition holds a solution to a contemporary crisis."³³

So secure is Gunnell with this prospect of a politically and theoretically emasculated "field" that he readmits, although in somewhat different guise, many of the tabooed notions he had laboriously expelled throughout the course of his book. After attacking my notion of paradigmatic theories as without credibility, he begins his little sketch (of the history of political theory?) with Plato, who is described as "the prototypical political theorist."³⁴

After excoriating the mythmakers for concocting an overly dramatic, apocalyptic, heroes-and-villains conception of "the tradition," Gunnell, without qualification, announces that "all political theory has a dramaturgical quality."³⁵ Finally, although Gunnell ridiculed my notion of an epic pattern in some political theories, he then claims, with an air of discovery, that "the theorist . . . seeks immortality in producing a work of universal understanding of political things that will be (quoting Thucydides) 'a possession for all time.'"³⁶

Since the history of political theory is now replaced by a "field" which owes its existence to academic conventions alone, no element in that field is naturally privileged, nothing is primary, nothing is urgent, everything is safe. We are even "justified" in extending a hand to the myth-makers, or their shades, and allowing that political theory can be treated as "a distinct genre and even as a tradition if we are careful to acknowledge that these are analytical constructions created from the standpoint of present concerns and criteria."³⁷ This means, if I correctly grasp Gunnell's meaning, that what was arbitrary under cover of one category—the history of political theory—becomes legitimate under another. In this ecumenical euphoria established by conventionalism, Gunnell even appears to retract all the harsh things he said about the lack of historical and textual evidence for my conception of "the" tradition of political discourse. There are, he concedes, "family resemblances between the texts" that might make the dialogic metaphor credible; these resemblances, he adds, "are derived from historically demonstrable attributes of the texts."³⁸

Like most charitable acts, this one is as much a reflection of the needs of the donor as it is of the straits of the victims. Gunnell will give us what he calls a "portrait" to serve as an alternative to the old-fashioned histories of political theory and the more recent myths of tradition. But he does not want his portrait to be dismissed as merely a product of a different set of conventions. Conventionalism must not be taken to radical extremes. So he borrows, without any attempt at defending, Oakeshott's notion of an "analytical" conception of tradition that makes possible a distinction between "analytical" or "scholarly" conventions on the one hand, and "historical" conventions on the other. The latter term denotes conventions that are said to be "in the works themselves."³⁹ Armed with this distinction and all the question-begging aspects of conventions "in the works themselves," Gunnell sets out his alternative to the history of political theory. It is openly based on "analytical" constructs, notably ideal types, a concept which is treated by Gunnell as though it were an essentially uncontested notion. He offers us, in brief compass, a string of "portraits" of theorists, from Plato to Marx, in order to demonstrate the superiority of his approach to the one that locates a theorist in a tradition of discourse

or treats him as a canonical figure. "My group portrait is," he explained in a later article, "one in which the individuals are joined because they are in the portrait rather than being in the portrait because they are joined,"⁴⁰ meaning that his portrait does not rest entirely on its analytical basis but is supported by historical evidence and is "empirically falsifiable." "I have created the portrait and posed the figures," he explains, "but I have not invented the figures and their characteristics. I have simply brought them together, because according to an analytically constituted set of criteria, they look alike. But the basis of the criteria and their application is historical."⁴¹

At bottom, this sort of justification does not matter. No purpose is served by asking what Gunnell means by a "portrait" or what element of art goes into the "poses" or how much history is required to confirm the "historical . . . basis" of his "figures"—Mary Renault might make the same claims for her historical novels about ancient Greece. Certainly it is not a program that would have offended the scholars who pioneered the "history of political theory," Dunning, McIlwain, and Sabine. Actually, among the great illusions is the one that theoretical meanings can be arbitrated by appeals to "history" and "context." It is not only, as Pocock rightly argues, that ultimately the appeal to history involves a reductionism and this, I argue, makes a mockery of the interconnections of meaning that constitute the identity of a theory, that is, make it theoretical; nor is it only that "context" is a conceptual and not an empirical entity and that, without some explicit or tacit theory that furnishes criteria of discrimination, the designation of context becomes highly selective, if not arbitrary. Furthermore, I maintain that the disputes among historians about the dating of Locke's *Two Treatises of Government* have contributed less to causing us to reconsider our understandings of his theory than the works of Kendall or Macpherson. (Note: I said "reconsider" not "adopt.") To resume the main point, however, it should be clear by this late date that "history" can no longer be viewed as a neutral body of evidence that we can tap by consulting historians. There are at least as many schools among historians, each with its own "constructs" and theories, as in any other branch of the so-called human sciences. By consulting historians, all we do is to transfer the dispute over meaning to a different venue employing different criteria.

The main reason Gunnell's attempt to reconstitute the history of political theory as a Theophrastian exercise does not matter is that political theory, not its history, is his main target. He wants to legislate conventions for what he dubs "academic theory" because, at bottom, he is appalled by what he finds political theory to be. For Gunnell, as noted, academic theory, ideally, would generate its problems not from the world but from "the

actual issues that gave rise to the classical texts" and their "actual arguments."⁴² This prescription is offered not simply out of concern for historical veracity in interpretation. Making the texts more remote in time and substance is the equivalent of a prophylaxis that will protect the academic theorist from the dangerous character of classic theories. Gunnell contends that theorizing is an alienated activity and has always been so: "it was not integrally related to the political community but was marked by its alienation from it. These works were often outside traditional political thought and action and had little to do with their development."⁴³

Gunnell then portrays as pathological the theories that had loomed so large in the accounts of the four mythmakers, while the theorists themselves are depicted both as pathological and as profoundly cynical, that is, self-conscious, illusionists. The classic writers, according to Gunnell, recognized "the ultimate incompatibility between truth and politics." They saw that "political society cannot bear the truth of order in undiluted form," and therefore each set about concocting an illusion that "expresses their truth of order." They intended to foist their concoction on rulers and people so that, eventually, their behavior would be "structured by illusion."⁴⁴ Fortunately, theorists have met with a "profound lack of success" and have had "little impact."⁴⁵

Gunnell summarizes his "picture" by pronouncing classic theory to be "a kind of madness," a substitute gratification for power drives denied, "more alchemy than science, more like the work of Frankenstein."⁴⁶ Underlying this characterization and the project for a decorous academic theory is a view of the contemporary world as so politically corrupt that theory appears a hopeless undertaking. "There may be an important sense," he writes, "in which the open society and political theory are incompatible." this is not, he hastens to add, because the "open society is necessarily the good society" but because "in a society marked by conditions of extreme tolerance and the soft despotism of mass society that oppresses by ignoring" political theory, there is no space for the theorist. Nor is there an object of theorizing, because there is no public realm, no political community, only the open society with its exaltation of "private over substantive ends." Political theory is an "anachronism," a "heroic venture" that requires what no one should dare, let alone hope, to achieve. It requires "boldness" and "arrogance" to "see into the future," "to threaten society with disaster," and to undertake to persuade "every man" that what he thinks is real about the world and himself "is in fact an illusion."⁴⁷

With this understanding, the circle is complete. The attempt to theorize the political is pronounced ultimately to be pathological. The larger purpose that is served by this verdict is a political one. It would close off one mode of critical thought, not by silencing it but by trivializing it.

APPENDIX

In this appendix, I discuss the specific charges that Gunnell levels against my writings. At the outset, a general observation on Gunnell's project is appropriate because it bears on the large number of misunderstandings that mar his treatment of my ideas. Gunnell identifies his main target, "the myth of the tradition," with four writers whose intentions, political commitments, and readings of past theories are very different. Yet at times, he appears to absolve them of responsibility for the "myth" or even of having espoused it. In some places, he describes the four as having "substantially contributed" to the myth; but he also says that, while the four "knew quite well what they were doing" and were open about their primary concern being with the politics of the present rather than "understanding the past for its own sake . . . their work led to the further unreflective entrenchment of a belief in the reality of the tradition."⁴⁸ Elsewhere, he complains that the idea of a tradition "has begun to take on a life of its own" because many "students and scholars" have come "to accept it without understanding its implications or the intentions of its creators."⁴⁹ For "many scholars and teachers," it has become the "paradigm in terms of which they work."⁵⁰ Clearly, if the issue turns on the use which is made of the viewpoint, as well as a use which would have been renounced by those who developed the viewpoint, then most of Gunnell's criticism should be directed at the paradigm workers. Gunnell wants it both ways; but to achieve that, he has to collapse the differences between the four or simply recite them as on a laundry list.

The contortions which Gunnell performs in order to corral all four writers is illustrated by his characterization of my disagreements with "Strauss and his followers."⁵¹ In our review of *Essays on the Scientific Study of Politics*, John Schaar and I concluded that the Straussian view of political education, as expressed in that volume, posed a bleak choice between a "morally corrupt and intellectually sterile scientism," associated with Bentley, Lasswell, Simon, *et al.*, and "a version of political philosophy distinguished by a moral fervor and an intellectual certainty that the essential nature of all political situations has been revealed long ago."⁵² Gunnell takes this comment as evidence of basic agreement rather than disagreement. This, he opines, "is definitely an interspecific debate . . . (whose) subtleties would hardly be apparent to the uninitiated . . . (while the) differences are in many respects not unlike, and maybe not as great as those between certain of schools of psychoanalysis."⁵³ Gunnell is, of course, right—provided that the uninitiated cannot tell the difference, say, between Freud and Jung.

In ascribing to me certain specific beliefs regarding either "the tradition" or notions supportive of such a belief, Gunnell has made several errors.

They are, I should add, embedded in allegations which he never attempts to work out. First, I never claimed that there is such a thing as "the tradition"⁵⁴ but rather that several traditions can be identified within the course of Western political thought. This is why, in *Politics and Vision*, I pit early Christian thought against classical theory and why I devote two chapters to Luther and Calvin respectively. Nor do I argue, as Gunnell alleges,⁵⁵ that political theory has declined steadily since Plato and Aristotle, or that there is one privileged model of the way political theory ought to be conducted. On the contrary, my chapter on Plato is strongly critical, and I deny specifically that political theory should be viewed as "an essence with an eternal nature." I state that it had been practiced in "many ways" and that "no single philosopher and no one historical age can be said to have defined it conclusively."⁵⁶ Nor do I write that the tradition has "degenerated" or become "decadent."⁵⁷ The chapter intitled "The Decline of Political Philosophy" discusses the loss of the sense of the political in the modern world, which I do not roundly characterize as "decadence" but as a "diffusion of the political" and its relocation in nonpolitical settings.⁵⁸ Moreover, in my discussions of Machiavelli, Calvin, and Rousseau, I contended that, in some specific respects, they represent reinvigorating forces in theory and political practice.

Along with Strauss, Voegelin, and Arendt, I am accused by Gunnell of riveting onto the history of theory a fixed canon of great writers, of conveying the impression that the great theorists were all "philosophers" and nothing more. In my discussion of Luther and Calvin, I note that both "were actors as well as thinkers;"⁵⁹ in my monograph on Hobbes, I discussed at some length the question of the practical concerns of theorists.⁶⁰ Moreover, my inclusion of early Christian writers, classical political economists, the founders of twentieth-century sociology, and recent theorists of organization and administration hardly fits the notion of a select canon that includes a few names from Plato to Marx.

One of the incomprehensible charges by Gunnell is that my interpretations of theoretical activity fail to relate political theorists to the questions of their day, treating them instead as if their "basic concern" and "motive" were to participate in "the Great Dialogue" and picturing them as engrossed completely in timeless problems of a philosophical nature.⁶¹ In effect, Gunnell accuses me of a conception of "the" tradition that resembles a hermeneutical circle in which, like the Lowells and Cabots, theorists speak only to each other and a few speak only to God. One of my main purposes in *Politics and Vision* is to explore a metaconception of theory that accounts not only for continuity and innovation but for other things as well: for the theorist's self-understanding, for the phenomenon of writers in different eras using the same vocabulary but meaning different

things, and for the theorist's attempt to engage the issues of his society on a theoretical rather than a "policy" plane. I conclude that "most formal political speculation has operated simultaneously at two different levels," one where he deals with "a vital problem of his day," the other where he intends a "a contribution to the continuing dialogue of Western political philosophy."⁶² Why, as Gunnell alleges,⁶³ this does not suggest a "context" to theorizing is altogether unclear.

In using the word "dialogue" to characterize the complex ways in which a theorist engages a past writer, I do not suggest anywhere that the "basic concern" of theorists was to participate in it.⁶⁴ The phrase which I used and best characterized my notions is "a tradition of discourse."⁶⁵ The focus was on the crucial role played by inherited notions and concepts that add up, in my view, to a vocabulary for talking about politics. I try not only to draw attention to what Gunnell admits exists, namely, that theorists do engage other theorists, but I also try to indicate that such an engagement includes far more than the question of why the theories of one century can be intelligible to a later one. I attempt to emphasize the connections between theories and experience, theories and institutions, and the way these contributed to the modification of inherited notions and concepts:

In addressing himself to persisting ideas from the past, a political philosopher unavoidably infects his own thought with past ideas and situations that have been similarly implicated with their own precedents. In this sense, the past is never wholly superseded; it is constantly being recaptured at the very moment that human thought is seemingly preoccupied with the unique problems of its own time.⁶⁶

Gunnell singles out my notion of tradition as "the most vulnerable to the charge of lacking historicity."⁶⁷ One reason for my vulnerability is that Gunnell has misquoted me on some points and misunderstood me on others. When I offered the broad hypothesis that theorists have adhered to certain conventions of inquiry, I did not describe these as "very well-defined"⁶⁸ but as "fairly well-defined."⁶⁹ Nor, as Gunnell alleges, did I "attempt to portray the tradition as a succession of 'epic' or 'heroic' theories."⁷⁰ Rather, as the quotation cited by Gunnell demonstrates, I was concerned to identify "an epic tradition in political theory."⁷¹

As for the charge of treating writers without proper regard for historical context or for the concrete concerns of theorists, I can only point out that my discussion of Plato begins by attacking the vulgar interpretation of him as a "pure" theorist and then asserting that "he spoke directly to Greek political experience." I further note that his major political categories "were not the invention of philosophical fancy but the stuff of Athenian

political history.”⁷² In subsequent chapters, I describe the way new political conditions accompanying the Hellenistic Empire affected theorizing,⁷³ the way Rome’s evolution from republic to empire encouraged a distinctive “politics of interest” and a politics of institutions and law that were reflected in the Roman political vocabulary,⁷⁴ the way Augustine’s theory was a response to the concrete problems of politicized religions,⁷⁵ the way Luther’s theological and political notions were hammered out in reference to Church teachings and governance as well as to the actions or rulers,⁷⁶ or the way Machiavelli’s thought had to be situated in the context of the Italian Renaissance.⁷⁷

Finally, Gunnell takes me to task for my attempt to borrow from Thomas Kuhn’s work on scientific theories.⁷⁸ Yet he systematically misses the political point of my effort and displays a curious resistance to the evidence that tends to sustain some of my points. I state the way one might consider the nature of the classic works in political theory in the light of Kuhn’s discussion of scientific theories. One aim was to try to give an account of theoretical changes—a topic central to Kuhn’s endeavor; another was to explore the possible sense in which there could be said to be a “community” of theorists, including something like “normal” scientific activity; and, finally, I wanted to go beyond Kuhn, who stopped before exploring the relationship between scientific activity and structures of political power. In part, this was prompted by the fact that at the time I composed my essays on this subject, the official spokesmen of the American Political Science Association were making a concerted effort to appropriate Kuhn and trumpet the arrival of the “behavioral paradigm” and the “scientific revolution” in political science. The irony in my essays is lost on Gunnell, as is the political intention. I did not, as he alleges, claim that “a significant similarity [exists] between the history of science and the history of political theory.”⁷⁹ I state flatly that “my purpose is not to argue that political theory is a species of scientific theory” but rather to explore “the analogy between political theory and scientific paradigms.”⁸⁰ Elsewhere, I was careful to formulate my thesis as “that the traditional idea of political theory displays some features which resemble forms of scientific theory but which, by virtue of their political bearing, are uniquely the properties of political theory.”⁸¹ It seemed to me that Kuhn’s thesis about “revolutionary” changes in scientific theorizing could be used to discover something interesting about changes in political theories, and, above all, to open up inquiry into the nature of conventions as it pertains to innovative political theories. At the same time, I wanted to use the idea of “normal science” to account for something that had always puzzled me, namely, the large number of “minor” theorists who are rarely read in later centuries. The hope was that it might be possible to establish useful categories for dealing with the

recurrent question of why some writers are deemed major and others minor. As my language at that time indicated, I tried to encourage the notion that much was to be learned about theorizing by examining the minor writers.⁸²

Gunnell has little or nothing to say about these ideas. Instead he argues, first, that "there is a question" whether the history of political theory is "in any way a history of disciplined activity comparable to that of science."⁸³ Gunnell does not indicate what would count as "disciplined activity," much less whether the discipline of science has always been as rigorous as it is nowadays. Judging by the historical evidence concerning the study of politics and philosophy in Plato's Academy or Aristotle's Lyceum, it would stand comparison with the "discipline" present in the teaching of Greek science. I suggest, too, that for centuries, beginning with late classicism, continuing with Arabic, medieval, and then renaissance scholars and commentators, there was a continuous history of careful discussion surrounding many of the major texts of ancient political theory. This constituted a body of transmitted theories, they became a standard feature of education, and they reappear in many political writers. The example of Aquinas' well-known commentaries on Aristotle illustrates the transmission of theories as well as their creative adaptation to new problems provoked by a factor, namely, the medieval church, unknown to Aristotle. I also argue that in later times Marx's writings serve as a paradigm for later generations of Marxists and even non-Marxists to extend, and to modify. I think both of these examples would stand up to a fair test of being disciplined, perhaps even overdisciplined.

Gunnell then asserts that "it is even more doubtful that the relationship of the classic theorist to politics is similar to that of the revolutionary scientist to the scientific community."⁸⁴ Since Gunnell does not offer any elaboration of his objection, responding is difficult. Briefly, my reasoning is thus: political society stands to the theorist as nature to the scientist; such societies possess belief-systems that embody the values and claims of the society. Theories are constructed as critiques of those belief-systems (which I call "operative paradigms"). Critique, I suggest, is an essential part of a theoretical structure and I cite Book One of More's *Utopia* as an example. The other or complementary side of a theoretical structure is its "counter-paradigm," in which the theorist develops his solution to the evils or ills associated with the operative paradigm. When Gunnell volunteers the suggestion that Cromwell rather than Hobbes was the political counterpart to Newton, he misses the point.

In concluding, I do not want to leave an impression that my previous work is unblemished or that Gunnell has not made some telling criticisms of it. Several of the themes which he sketches in his concluding chapter

are ones that I have been developing since *Politics and Vision* and hope to publish soon. In particular, I plan to give a detailed account of the emergence of the idea of "theory," its varied permutations, what is meant by the structure of a theory, of the nature of theorizing and the theoretical vocation, and of the relation of theorists to structures of power and rival forms of knowledge. One of the important points I will address is the vexed relationship between the idea of theory and the idea of philosophy, and I freely acknowledge that Gunnell is correct in criticizing me for implying that all theorists were in some sense philosophizing. I would even state the point more strongly: I failed to grasp fully the radical changes that have taken place, especially during the last century, in the understanding and practice of philosophy. Likewise, Gunnell is on solid ground in insisting that one has to take into account the strong commitments toward action that defined earlier conceptions of theorizing. As suggested above, I have been at work on that question for more than a decade and thoroughly endorse Gunnell's claim.

Notes

1. Sheldon S. Wolin, "Political Theory as a Vocation," *American Political Science Review*, 63, 4, December, 1969, 1062-1082, on 1066-1067.
2. PT, 125.
3. J.G.A. Pocock, "Intentions, Traditions and Methods: Sounds on a Fog-Horn," *Annals of Scholarship*, 1, 4, Fall, 1980, 57-62, on 61.
4. Actually, Arendt gave only passing notice to the disputes; and Voegelin even less.
5. PT, 10.
6. PT, x, 133, 134.
7. PT, 22.
8. Anthony Quinton, "Introduction," *Political Philosophy*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1967, 1-18.
9. PT, 89.
10. MMST, 55.
11. PT, xiv.
12. PT, 138.
13. PT, 135.

14. Gunnell acknowledges in passing that "the claims" of each "are by no means exactly the same," which is a notable understatement: PT, xx.
15. PT, xx.
16. PT.
17. PT, 58.
18. MMST, 49.
19. PT, 87-88.
20. PT, 24.
21. PT, xix, xx.
22. Sheldon S. Wolin, *Politics and Vision*, Boston, Little, Brown, 1960, v.
23. PT, 25.
24. MMST, 54.
25. MMST, 54-55.
26. PT, 35.
27. Wolin, "Political Theory as a Vocation," 1077.
28. PT, 134.
29. MMST, 55.
30. Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, Garret Barden and John Cumming, ed. and trans., New York, Seabury Press, (1960, 1965), 1975, 204-209, 234.
31. Possibly Gunnell is reacting to my remarks in "Political Theory as a Vocation," 1077.
32. PT, 134.
33. PT, 134, 135.
34. PT, 136. Cf. Sheldon S. Wolin, *Hobbes and the Epic Tradition of Political Theory*, Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1970, 5: "Plato was the paradigmatic figure of [the epic] tradition."
35. PT, 156.
36. PT, 141.
37. PT, 135.
38. MMST, 49.
39. PT, 86.
40. MMST, 50.
41. MMST, 51, 50.

42. MMST, 55.
43. PT, 89.
44. PT, 156, 157.
45. PT, 153.
46. PT, 158.
47. PT, 160-161.
48. PT, xx.
49. PT, 70.
50. PT, 71.
51. PT, 58.
52. Quoted in PT, 58, from: John H. Schaar and Sheldon S. Wolin, "Essays on the Scientific Study of Politics: A Critique," *American Political Science Review*, 57, 1, March, 1963, 125-150, on 150.
53. PT, 58.
54. PT, 34.
55. PT.
56. Wolin, *Politics and Vision*, 1-2.
57. PT, 34-35.
58. Wolin, *Politics and Vision*, 429ff.
59. *Ibid.*, 193.
60. Wolin, *Hobbes . . .*, 39ff.
61. PT, 84-85, 88.
62. Wolin, *Politics and Vision*, 25.
63. PT, 89.
64. PT, 88.
65. Wolin, *Politics and Vision*, 22.
66. *Ibid.*, 26.
67. PT, 83.
68. PT.
69. Sheldon S. Wolin, "Political Theory: Trends and Goals," *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, David L. Sills, ed., New York, Macmillan, 1968, Vol. 12, 318-330, on 319.
70. PT, 84.

71. Wolin, *Hobbes* . . . , 4, emphasis added.
72. Wolin, *Politics and Vision*, 40.
73. *Ibid.*, 70.
74. *Ibid.*, 71, 83, 87.
75. *Ibid.*, 121.
76. *Ibid.*, 145.
77. *Ibid.*, 195–201.
78. *PT*, 83–85.
79. *PT*, 84.
80. Sheldon S. Wolin, “Paradigms and Political Theories,” *Politics and Experience*, Preston King and Bhikhu Parekh, eds., Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1968, 125–152, on 139, 143.
81. Wolin, “Political Theory as a Vocation,” 1078.
82. Wolin, “Paradigms and Political Theories,” 141–142.
83. *PT*, 84.
84. *Ibid.*

CHAPTER IV

Philosophy and History: John Gunnell and Leo Strauss on Tradition and Interpretation

NATHAN TARCOV

I. "THE MYTH OF THE TRADITION"

Leo Strauss probably remains the single most influential and controversial writer of the history of political philosophy. In the past decade, J.G.A. Pocock and Quentin Skinner have challenged his approach with their critique of the conventional view of the tradition of canonical texts, their emphasis on the importance of linguistic context, and their insistence on a genuinely historical approach. While they have not attempted a systematic examination of Strauss's work, John Gunnell has recently done so, beginning with some of their methodological reflections.¹ I shall consider some intriguing questions raised by Gunnell about the character of Strauss's work: whether it is meant to be historical and scientific, and what notions it presupposes of the meaning of the tradition and of the relation between interpretation and critique.

Gunnell warns that "to understand Strauss requires a comprehensive view of his enterprise and a careful examination of what he has to say about it," for so far the character of that enterprise has "still remained elusive." But Gunnell also wants to use his interpretation of Strauss's work "to identify and illuminate the structural attributes and governing intentions characteristic" of a "type of literature."² Gunnell claims that Strauss's work "belongs to a genre which has dominated teaching and research in this area for some time."³ In particular, Gunnell claims that "Strauss's concept of a tradition of political philosophy exemplifies a regulative paradigm,"⁴ which is shared by Hannah Arendt, Eric Voegelin, and Sheldon Wolin

and originates in the work of earlier scholars such as William A. Dunning and George H. Sabine.⁵ Gunnell calls this paradigm "the myth of the tradition."

The first characteristic of this paradigm is that it is "informed by a concern with developing a critique of contemporary politics and political thought," a "practical" and "instrumental" concern.⁶ Its basic context is a belief that "the conventional chronology of classic texts . . . constitutes an actual historical tradition or inherited pattern of thought."⁷ In other words, it assumes "a historically delimited activity in which the individuals selected self-consciously engaged."⁸ It treats these works as if they "belong to a distinct genre," despite "obvious disparities between the intentions and purposes of a particular classic authors, the types of literary composition, and the circumstances of production."⁹ It assumes they are concerned with a "common set of problems or ideas (representation, freedom, authority, power, justice, obligation, etc.)."¹⁰ Finally, it assumes that this tradition is responsible for recent political thought and practice, which it understands to be in a state of crisis that both requires and permits the recovery of the tradition.¹¹

Gunnell protests that this kind of exercise is not "illegitimate" and that his concern is not to "denigrate" it, but he also complains that those who accept it do not realize its "mythical" character and are unaware of "some of the more obvious methodological problems" implicit in it, even though they require "very little effort to expose."¹² Indeed, he concludes that "nothing has more obscured the meaning of many of the classic texts in political philosophy, and deflected attention away from the criteria for judging claims about such meaning, than the literature propagating the myth of the tradition."¹³

Although Gunnell's discussions are neither polemical nor apologetic, they include misunderstandings of Strauss's work common to some of Strauss's critics and admirers. Gunnell argues that Strauss was one of the chief proponents of "the myth of the tradition." Gunnell bases his characterization of Strauss's work as mythical, and even intentionally mythical, on the claims that: (1) Strauss presented a naive and conventional account of "the tradition" as a norm, intelligible only in view of his practical purpose; (2) Strauss's thesis of exoteric writing is unscientific; and (3) Strauss violated his own simple nonhistoricist separation of history and philosophy, interpretation and critique. My examination of these claims will highlight some of the most problematic features of Strauss's work. In particular, I shall emphasize the enormous serious (nonmythical) importance of history for Strauss, and how far he was from any simple nonhistoricism. (By "simple nonhistoricism," I mean the general view that truth is always directly accessible to human beings and the particular view that we can without

any need for history engage in conversation with the texts of the past as if they were our contemporaries.)

Gunnell rehearses Strauss's beginning with the "crisis of the West," caused by the decline of political philosophy and especially its destruction by positivism and historicism.¹⁴ He points out that the crisis both demands and makes feasible the historical studies that are paradoxically required to recover a nonhistorical political philosophy.¹⁵ He attributes to Strauss the thesis that the classical political philosophy begun by Socrates is the true political philosophy.¹⁶ According to Gunnell, Strauss has divided "the great tradition" into classical and modern, with "progressive deterioration" or "cumulative error" setting in with Machiavelli.¹⁷ Gunnell attributes to Strauss a "very practical purpose:" to uncover the hidden meaning of modern political philosophy and destroy its creditability," thereby "undercutting the foundations of modern liberalism, communism, and allied doctrines."¹⁸ Indeed, he asserts that Strauss's "particular reconstruction of the tradition of political philosophy is intelligible only in view of his strategic reasons for undertaking it."¹⁹

Gunnell complains that Strauss provides no general theory of interpretation to support his demand for objectivity and fails to "demonstrate the existence of the tradition" by "an account of actual historical connections between the ideas of the figures" or of its impact on politics.²⁰ Instead of understanding thinkers as they understood themselves,

Strauss approaches authors as having set out to write political philosophy as Strauss defines it and already counts them as participants in the alleged tradition. The substantive "intention" (such as Machiavelli's intention to transform classical political philosophy or Hobbes's intention to ameliorate Machiavelli's teaching) which Strauss attributes to authors is often largely a function of the place Strauss assigns them in the reconstructed tradition rather than something clearly elicited from their work.²¹

Gunnell claims that owing to Strauss's "preconception about the existence and character of the tradition," the meaning of the authors is established "before he sets about interpreting their work."²² Finally, Gunnell's most intriguing claim is that Strauss's work reflects "the structure of the historicist pattern of thought," especially that of Heidegger, and that it violates his own insistence on separating philosophy and history, interpretation and critique.²³ On the basis of these claims, Gunnell concludes that it is irrelevant to fault Strauss for faulty history because he did not engage in history at all. Instead, in a playful Platonic spirit, Strauss supposedly put myth in a historical form as a concession to our age. He did not "engage in a conversation with the past" but did "stage a conversation with the past."²⁴

II. STRAUSS'S TRADITION

Although Gunnell raises an important question about the relationships of philosophy and history and of criticism and interpretation in Strauss's work, his is not an entirely accurate or adequate account of that work. Gunnell ignores Strauss's qualifications, conditions, and precise meaning in a number of matters that bear directly on crucial issues.

Strauss did not simply present the conventional tradition as a norm. Even the apparently elementary claim that Strauss "maintains that political philosophy was begun by Socrates" ignores Strauss's qualifications.²⁵ Strauss reported that, "according to the traditional view," Socrates was the founder of political philosophy, but Strauss went on to warn that the view "is in need of some qualifications, or rather explanations; yet it is less misleading than any alternative view."²⁶ A few pages later, Strauss explained that the doctrine of natural right was "developed prior to Socrates," although "developed by Socrates and classical political philosophy in general much beyond the earlier views."²⁷ Elsewhere, Strauss was equally careful about this point. He reported that Socrates "is said" to have been the founder of political philosophy and qualified his further remarks "to the extent to which this is true."²⁸ He did so only after discussing "pre-Socratic natural right."²⁹ In another case, he not only attributed this claim to the "traditional view," but he noted that that view "is no longer accepted" because of the political concerns of the sophists; he then discussed that counterclaim.³⁰ There he also added a discussion of Hippodamus, "the first political philosopher."³¹

Gunnell expresses a widespread view, that "a crucial element in Strauss's argument is his thesis that 'classical political philosophy is the true science of political things,' and he maintains that the 'essential character of all political situations was grasped by the old political science.'"³² The words Gunnell quotes are indeed Strauss's, but what Strauss said in the first passage invoked is that the social scientist who attempts to understand classical political philosophy "is compelled to wonder whether not present day social science but classical political philosophy is the true science of political things."³³ This is followed by an explicit statement that such a return to classical political philosophy is "tentative or experimental."³⁴ Similarly, the second passage quoted by Gunnell begins "Now if . . ."³⁵

In his book, Gunnell makes Strauss refer to classical political philosophy as "*the true political philosophy*" and "*the political truth*."³⁶ The first does not appear at all on the footnoted pages, and the second appears only as part of the statement that the historian cannot "rule out the possibility that the historical setting of one particular political philosophy is the ideal condition for the discovery of *the political truth*."³⁷ Both phrases do appear,

however, a few pages before. But there, as appears from Gunnell's re-statement in his article on Strauss, they are also made without particular reference to classical political philosophy.³⁸ Strauss's intention was to reopen the quarrel of the ancients and moderns, to render it *an open question*. He indeed suggested that only a fool would consider the question definitely settled in favor of the ancients.³⁹ Precisely because Strauss did not so regard it, he did not "pursue a practical or political intention of the foundation of the classical teaching."⁴⁰

Gunnell, along with Pocock⁴¹ and Skinner,⁴² states that Strauss characterized Machiavelli, the founder of modern political philosophy, as "a devil" and "a teacher of evil."⁴³ The first epithet comes from a conditional sentence of Strauss's that begins "even if, and precisely if, we are forced to grant that his teaching is diabolical and he himself a devil" In that paragraph, Strauss recommended the "considerate ascent" from that "insufficient" . . . simple opinion" to a recognition of "what is truly admirable in Machiavelli."⁴⁴ Similarly, the second epithet come from the notorious first sentence of *Thoughts on Machiavelli*: "We shall not shock anyone, we shall merely expose ourselves to goodnatured or at any rate harmless ridicule, if we profess ourselves inclined to the old-fashioned and simple opinion according to which Machiavelli was a teacher of evil."⁴⁵ Strauss went on to write of the "deficiency" of that opinion, even though it is "decisively superior to the prevailing sophisticated views."⁴⁶ As Strauss asked his readers at one point, "May not a statement assume a different shade of meaning by being cast in the form of a conditional sentence?"⁴⁷ Persistent disregard of a writer's conditional expressions or repetition of his provisional first statements without any attention to his subsequent qualifications can never be appropriate; it does not do justice to Strauss's subtlety of speech.⁴⁸

Gunnell describes Strauss's view of the tradition as one of "progressive deterioration," with "cumulative error" beginning with Machiavelli.⁴⁹ This description does not convey the peculiar complexity of Strauss's account of modernity. Strauss presented the key figures of both Rousseau and Nietzsche, the first figures of, respectively, the second and third "waves" of modernity as representing both a "return to antiquity" and an "advance of modernity," as representing both a "return to antiquity" and an "advance of modernity."⁵⁰ More precisely, he claimed of the second wave that "the return to premodern thought was only the initial step of a movement which led, consciously or unconsciously, to a much more radical form of modernity—to a form of modernity which was still more alien to classical thought."⁵¹ Strauss appeared to accept much of Rousseau's critique of the first wave and Nietzsche's critique of the second. Rousseau thought through Hobbes's critique, whereas Hobbes was inconsistent.⁵² Because of Nietzsche's critique of modern rationalism, we cannot "return to the earlier forms of

modern thought.”⁵³ The “most radical historicism” (by which Strauss apparently referred to Heidegger) is the “culmination” and “highest self-consciousness” of modern thought.⁵⁴ We are indebted to it because it “compels us . . . to realize the need for unbiased reconsideration of the most elementary premises whose validity is presupposed by philosophy.”⁵⁵ Strikingly, even Strauss’s presentation of classical political philosophy is indebted to radical historicism for the insight or formulation that all knowledge presupposes a horizon.⁵⁶

This dialectical character of Strauss’s account seems to “reflect the structure of the historicist pattern of thought.”⁵⁷ For, according to Strauss, “the assumption that restorations of earlier teachings are impossible, or that every intended restoration necessarily leads to an essential modification of the restored teaching” is “characteristic of historicism.”⁵⁸ The difference may be that for Strauss, restoration is impossible not by general necessity but only within the premises of modern thought or as long as we do not reconsider (rather than merely presuppose) the most elementary philosophic premises. In any case, Strauss’s sense of the difficulty of restoration of earlier teachings distinguishes him from simple nonhistoricism.

Attributing to Strauss’s “a very practical purpose”: is not correct “uncovering the hidden meaning of modern political philosophy,” thereby “undercutting the foundations of modern liberalism, communism, and allied doctrines . . . are, in his view, at the center of the crisis of the West.”⁵⁹ Gunnell supports this claim by footnoting a passage where Strauss wrote that Nietzsche “thought it equitable to look down with contempt on the British philosophers, in particular on Bacon and Hobbes. Yet Bacon and Hobbes were the first philosophers of power, and Nietzsche’s own philosophy is a philosophy of power. Was not ‘the will to power’ so appealing because its true ancestry was ignored?”⁶⁰ If one had to translate Strauss’s point into this ideological idiom, one would have to say that Strauss’s practical purpose was to undercut the foundations of fascism by showing its hidden origins in liberalism! According to Strauss, modern political philosophy provides the foundations of present-day conservatism, as well as of liberalism and communism; and liberal democracy derives powerful support from premodern thought.⁶¹

Gunnell rightly connects Strauss’s purpose to his sense of the “crisis of the West” but complains that “the crisis, its symptoms, and its causes tend to blur somewhat” in Strauss’s analysis.⁶² Strauss, however, defined with tolerable distinctness what he meant; “The crisis of the West consists in the West’s having become uncertain of its purpose.”⁶³ He explicitly denied that the danger from communism constitutes the crisis.⁶⁴ He was concerned with “the theoretical crisis” not “a practical crisis.”⁶⁵ He also defined with tolerable distinctness the purpose in which the West has lost confidence.

It is the one expressed "in famous official declarations made during the two World Wars."⁶⁶ In American terms, it is the one embodied in the self-evident truths of the Declaration of Independence.⁶⁷ It is "the purpose stated originally by the most successful form of modern political philosophy," Locke's.⁶⁸ It is liberalism and liberal democracy.⁶⁹ In its most developed form, it is "the universal society, a society consisting of equal nations, each consisting of free and equal men and women, with all these nations to be fully developed as regards their power of production, thanks to science."⁷⁰

According to Strauss, the three main questions that lead to doubt of the West's purpose are: whether universalism is better than particularism, whether there is a connection linking affluence with justice and happiness, and whether science is essentially in the service of human power.⁷¹ He traced loss of confidence in that purpose only partly to events, especially the experience of Communism, and partly to the denial by positivism and historicism in that a rational justification can be made for any universal purpose. But "the deepest reason for the crisis of liberal democracy" is that "the critique of modern rationalism or of the modern belief in reason by Nietzsche cannot be dismissed or forgotten."⁷² Gunnell, therefore, has taken Strauss's premise for his goal. Not modern liberalism but the loss of confidence in it constitutes the crisis.⁷³ Strauss's purpose is not to undercut liberalism practically but to find a theoretical solution to the problem posed by its having already been undercut. The opposite impression may underlie much of the political hostility to his work.

Strauss's work is less open to the criticism that it is "intelligible only in view of the argument about contemporary politics and political ideas that it supports,"⁷⁴ that it is to the opposite complaint, that its protreptic about the contemporary crisis is an unsatisfying tease. Strauss seemed to lead us from concern with the contemporary crisis on a journey through classical philosophy, from which we do not return, or at least not with an explicit solution or "argument about contemporary politics." He warned us that the classics cannot "supply us with recipes for today's use" but can at most provide the starting point for our own analysis of present society and our own solutions to present problems.⁷⁵ Strauss warned of dangerous consequences if we do not recognize that "the teaching of the classics can have no immediate practical effect."⁷⁶

This historicist charge that Strauss's interpretations are intelligible only in the context of contemporary argument, or that he lacks "openness to the past," amounts to calling him, in his own terms, a dogmatic historian.⁷⁷ According to Strauss, such a historian "starts from a settled and passionately asserted view concerning the problems of political philosophy and their solutions; and the various doctrines which he considers, he views primarily not in themselves but within the framework supplied by what one may

call his personal views." For such a description to be applicable to Strauss himself, his views must first be obvious and his voice must be "more audible than that of the writers he discusses."⁷⁸ That far from being the case, Strauss's students and admirers exhibit uncertainty and disagreement as to what his moral and political, and well as his metaphysical and theological, views were.⁷⁹ If Strauss's own views are unclear, concluding that his interpretations of past writers are intelligible only as reflections of his views is difficult.

Gunnell also claims that Strauss's view of the tradition "was to a large extent a direct response to the attack on this field of scholarship by contemporary political scientists."⁸⁰ Gunnell disclaims undertaking "an intellectual biography" of Strauss, but he ought to know that Strauss's basic account of the tradition, with its attempt to reopen the quarrel between the ancients and the moderns, antedates both Strauss's membership in the academic profession of political science and the attack by contemporary political scientists as described by Gunnell.⁸¹

Judging Gunnell's claims about Strauss is complicated by the fact that Gunnell's "principal concern" is not with Strauss *per se* but with a "kind," "type," or "genre" of literature, including Arendt, Voegelin, and Wolin.⁸² Some of Gunnell's statements about Strauss are intelligible only as having drifted in from his accounts of these other figures. For example, Gunnell attributes to Strauss the opinion that "classical political philosophy emerged with the origins of politics in the Greek polis and at a moment of crisis in that culture."⁸³ I am not aware that Strauss wrote anything about the origins of politics or a crisis in Greek culture.

Gunnell views Strauss as one of those who treat the canonical works as if they were "concerned with a common set of problems or ideas (representation, freedom, authority, power, justice, obligation, etc.)."⁸⁴ No reader of Strauss should recognize that list. Indeed, an intelligent reader should recognize that one of Strauss's contributions was to have shown that those conventional *topoi* were not the central concerns for many major political philosophers. Even Strauss's argument that there are permanent problems did not prevent him from admitting that "not all political philosophers face the permanent problems."⁸⁵

Nor was Strauss one of those who treats works of diverse "types of literary composition" as if they were one of genre.⁸⁶ Strauss himself insisted on the importance of the diverse literary characters of the works he considered: "Different weights have to be attached to the explicit statements of the scientific *Tractatus politicus* on the one hand and, on the other, to those of the popular-scientific *Leviathan*, the deliberately unscientific *Civil Government*, the voluntarily obscure *Esprit des lois*, or the rhetorical *Reflections on the Revolution in France*."⁸⁷ Strauss emphasized that Plato's

Republic, "in contradistinction to the *Politics*, is not a treatise but a dialogue," and his whole interpretation is based on its dialogic character.⁸⁸ His interpretation of Machiavelli emphasized the distinct genres of the *Prince* and the *Discourses*.⁸⁹ His interpretation of Maimonides emphasized the different literary characters of the *Guide* and the *Code*.⁹⁰

Strauss's own writings differ in genre. Gunnell notes that "most of Strauss's scholarship consists" of "historical investigation."⁹¹ Nevertheless, only one of Gunnell's footnotes to Strauss is to one of his interpretations of "historical investigations."⁹² All of the rest are to prefaces and introductions, general essays, or critiques of other scholars. Victor Gourevitch, however, suggests that Strauss's prefaces and introductions are the places where he wrote in a popular manner, whereas his historical investigations are the places he expressed his own views in the guise of textual commentary.⁹³

Gunnell emphasizes the distinction between the theory and the practice of interpretation.⁹⁴ But Gunnell's understanding of Strauss's theory of interpretation is decisively shaped by Gunnell's unsupported judgment of Strauss's practice. A systematic account of Strauss's practice of interpretation or even of an instance of it would be a valuable supplement to an account of Strauss's statements about interpretation. Such an account would show that Strauss's discussions of writers can be divided further between actual textual interpretations and mere summaries or other kinds of remarks that present only the results of interpretations.

Examples of statements that merely present the products of interpretation are the brief statements about authors in "What is Political Philosophy?" or the longer accounts of writers in *Natural Right and History*. If Strauss offered only statements of this sort, there would be some basis for the impression that his interpretations of particular authors and texts are dictated by his larger scheme and their "assigned roles" in the tradition. But Strauss offered textual interpretations that do not explicitly start from any assumptions about the place of the author or text in a larger framework. One would have to show just where such assumptions enter and how they distort an interpretation that seems to start from ignorance.

In actual textual interpretations, Strauss took the reader from initial incomprehension through various provisional statements toward a fuller understanding, often (though not always) working from the beginning through the end of the text. In this way, Strauss displayed something of the process of his interpretation and not merely its products. Examples of this enterprise are the chapters on the *Prince* and the *Discourses* in *Thoughts on Machiavelli* or the interpretation of the *Hiero* in *On Tyranny*.

Gunnell's claims to interpret Strauss's works themselves raise important hermeneutic questions, especially pertaining to the kinds of evidence an

interpreter must offer for particular kinds of claims. Gunnell produces no biographical evidence for his claim that "the figures [Strauss] selects to construct the tradition are simply already meaningful within the vision of the tradition he wishes to impart before he sets about interpreting their work."⁹⁵ Indeed, the opposite can be shown, in particular with regard to the very example Gunnell gives. In Strauss's earlier account of the tradition, Machiavelli did not figure as the transformer of classical political philosophy and Hobbes did. Only after interpreting Machiavelli did Strauss come to see that his account of the tradition had to be revised.⁹⁶ His interpretation of Machiavelli began from Machiavelli's own explicit statements of intention.⁹⁷ This example suggests that Strauss's textual interpretations precede and dictate his account of the tradition, rather than vice versa.

Nor does Gunnell demonstrate that Strauss's textual interpretations are so clearly mistaken that Strauss could not have meant them as historical interpretations but only as fulfillments of the requirements of the tradition. (Even if Gunnell means that Strauss wrote exoterically, then he would still have to find signs that Strauss did not mean his interpretations historically.) Gunnell asserts that because Strauss's work is not historical, "to point to fallacies in his method would be of little aid in understanding his argument."⁹⁸ But Strauss presented his interpretations as historical; and only if the fallacies were clearly exhibited, should we be inclined to entertain an alternate hypothesis about the character of his argument.

A final difficulty in judging Gunnell's claims arises from his stance of not blaming Strauss for propagating myths but expressing concern for those who accept them.⁹⁹ (Perhaps this denial of an author's responsibility for the likely way in which his writings will be read explains why Gunnell rejects the reality of the tradition and its impact.) Admittedly, Strauss's work has become a "paradigm" for inquiry by "his students and epigones."¹⁰⁰ At its most routine, their work may be guilty of what Gunnell charges: instead of being genuinely open to new insights and providing fresh interpretations, it provides all too predictable exegeses that fit texts into preassigned places, in some cases perhaps even for the sake of buttressing prior positions on contemporary political issues. Undoubtedly, most of us in the academic enterprise are, at best, second raters, incapable of producing original and important discoveries guided only by our own genius. As Locke noted, there are "but few" who "need not much Assistance from others, but by the Strength of their natural Genius . . . are . . . carried towards what is Excellent; and by the Privilege of their happy Constitutions, are able to do Wonders."¹⁰¹ Furthermore, most human beings care more about problems.¹⁰² Nevertheless, even at its most routine, the work of Strauss's followers is in touch with deep issues of more than ephemeral importance to human life. Strauss directed those who follow him not to

a framework of his own but to the closest experience of which they are capable with the greatest texts. In this sense, he made possible the preservation of the tradition of political philosophy.

III. IN DEFENSE OF THE TRADITION

Next to the sophisticated denial of the reality of the tradition of political philosophy or characterization of it as a myth, any argument for that tradition seems literally trivial, a repetition of things known to every college sophomore who has taken Western Civilization and reads the newspapers. One might, for instance, argue as follows. Everyone knows that Marxism is the most commonly invoked political theory in the world today, and it is reasonable to believe that this theory has something to do with the writings of Karl Marx. Had Marx never lived or had he become a professor of ancient philosophy, the exact same political ideas that now go under the name of Marxism might be current today and the same practices and institutions that they are used to justify would still exist. Marx himself might have argued as much. In actuality, those ideas did not come from somewhere else; they came from Marx. The writings of Marx and of those who have consciously followed him are the best access to the most powerful contemporary political theory. For whatever causal difficulties one might raise, the political orders of much of the world undoubtedly invoke Marx's principles as their justification, and a critique of that theory is as subversive of those regimes as an affirmation of it is necessary to their continuance or reformation. Marx made no secret of the fact that his theory is a transformation of Hegelian theory. Hegel was as openly involved in a transformation of Kantian theory. Kant's acknowledgement of his inspiration by Rousseau is well-known. Rousseau's critiques of Hobbes and Locke are as explicit as Hobbes's of "Aristotelity" or Aristotle's of his teacher, Plato.

Gunnell, of course, is aware of such connections,¹⁰³ but he insists that "although such connections may lend force to the idea of the tradition, they in no way give substance either to the assumption of the existence of the tradition or the principal claims about it."¹⁰⁴ Without trying to probe the meaning of this distinction, we can note Gunnell's willingness to admit that such connections "may be quite relevant in the interpretation of certain specific historical texts."¹⁰⁵ It is as if Gunnell permits us only to add together any two numbers in a column but not to take the whole sum. At times, he seems willing to concede every element of the tradition as long as it is not called "the tradition." For the frequent and extensive concessions he makes are remarkable:

I do not intend to imply that there are no historical connections between these texts or that there are no traditions of political thought, or even that there is no reasonable sense in which these works could be construed as comprising a tradition.¹⁰⁶

There are similarities between these works and similarities between the circumstances and concerns of their authors which justify comparison and generalization and an attempt to isolate them analytically and consider them as a type of literature which can be related to contemporary thought.¹⁰⁷

I do not wish to suggest that there is no such thing as a Western tradition of politics and political ideas. . . . Neither do I wish to imply that there are no grounds for considering collectively the works usually taken as constituting the tradition. The point is not to deny that these works are important products of Western culture or that they in some way, individually or together, illuminate our past and present. . . . [T]hey surely are part of a heritage that comes to us through various traditions of education and scholarship. As with any such heritage, they carry authoritative prescriptions which require critical examination and openness.¹⁰⁸

I am not suggesting that there are no reasons for considering the classic works as classic. . . . I do not wish to imply that there is no basis for viewing all the authors of these works as addressing themselves to a range of perennial problems of political life that transcend their most immediate concerns and historical circumstances. . . . Finally, it is not necessarily problematical to specify, on the basis of some criterion or other, certain similarities and differences in a range of chronologically ordered works and speak of this as a tradition of continuity and change.¹⁰⁹

There is no doubt that the authors of the classic works saw themselves as addressing issues of universal and timeless significance and that sometimes a similarity, and even a continuity, in the discussion of certain problems was recognized by the theorists themselves. . . . Occasionally an author specifically and overtly directed his argument toward a past thinker to either reject or draw upon the authority of that argument, and some have done so in a less explicit manner. In addition, there are various historical connections between these works and indications of varying degrees of the influence of one upon another.¹¹⁰

[I]t is not necessarily naive to look at this literature as a source of his political wisdom or even of basic truths about political things . . .¹¹¹

Gunnell's locutions make it difficult to determine whether he actually admits all the things that he does not deny. What then is at stake in Gunnell's denial of the reality of the tradition? Gunnell denies that the classic texts constitute:

- (1) the core of an inherited pattern of thought;¹¹²
- (2) an actual historical tradition or inherited pattern of thought;¹¹³
- (3) an inherited pattern of thought with causal implications for contemporary politics and political ideas;¹¹⁴
- (4) a historically delimited activity in which the individuals selected self-consciously engaged;¹¹⁵

- (5) philosophical exercises undertaken within the conventions of some particular ongoing activity;¹¹⁶
- (6) a distinct, self-defined genre;¹¹⁷
- (7) a profession in which the classic authors self-consciously participated;¹¹⁸
- (8) the product of a distinct activity and . . . a definite tradition of inquiry;¹¹⁹
- (9) the core of any specific inherited pattern of thought that informs contemporary politics;¹²⁰
- (10) the residue of a historically specifiable activity characterized by relatively persistent and stable concerns;¹²¹
- (11) a concrete and historically delimited activity in which individuals self-consciously addressed themselves to standard philosophical problems relating to the foundations of political life;¹²²
- (12) a demonstrable historical tradition;¹²³
- (13) a historical activity and disciplined mode of inquiry;¹²⁴
- (14) a historically recognizable conventional activity;¹²⁵
- (15) the core of an inherited pattern of thought that can be traced backward and causally related to contemporary politics;¹²⁶
- (16) a self-defined chronological tradition that has shaped modern politics; and¹²⁷
- (17) a natural whole.¹²⁸

Gunnell seems to be saying that, while the classic texts may constitute a tradition, they do not constitute an actual tradition; that is, they constitute only a "mythical" or, less candidly, an "analytical" tradition—they do not actually constitute a tradition.¹²⁹

Yet we have seen that Gunnell admits the existence of a Western tradition of political ideas; he denies only that the classic works constitute its core, either because it has no core or because it has some other core. Some of the foregoing disclaimers suggest that it is the element of self-consciousness that is decisively lacking, as does Gunnell's denial that "the differences between these works may be conceived as innovations in the tradition and the similarities construed as continuities."¹³⁰ But Gunnell, we have seen, has "no doubt" that the classic authors "saw themselves" as addressing timeless issues and sometimes even "recognized" their continuity and attacked, supported, and influenced one another. While it is surely a mistake to take any difference between one classic text and its classic predecessors as necessarily an innovation, it would be equally a mistake to deny the reality of such self-conscious declarations of innovation as Machiavelli's in Chapter 15 of the *Prince* and the Proemium and Chapter 58 of the first book of the *Discourses*, Hobbes's in the "Dedication" and

"Preface" to *De Dive*, or Rousseau's in the "Preface" and beginning of the *Second Discourse*.

Such claims to innovation and reference to the previous writers on politics show we must take the tradition seriously if we are to understand these texts as they present themselves. To concede that the greatest political thinkers of the past-addressed perennial problems were influenced by their predecessors, but to claim they did not do so self-consciously, is to say that fundamentally they did not know what they were doing. Such a claim to understand them better than themselves in the face of their explicit declarations is gratuitous.

Gunnell might object to assertions of the tradition only as exaggerations of the concessions he makes.¹³¹ He does not, however, seem to regard the difference as one only of degree. He complains that the "myth" treats the texts as a "reified," "organic," "natural whole," with "substantive character."¹³² To speak that way about the classic texts would indeed be unintelligible and preposterous. For instance, no one who took Aristotle's *Metaphysics* seriously would speak of these texts as together constituting a "natural whole." Strauss surely did not.

Perhaps Gunnell's objection to the tradition is not so much to its content as to its being treated as an *assumption*. He does not deny the historical connections between political philosophers but complains that Strauss did not offer an account of such connections.¹³³ Such a complaint, however, is partially belied by Strauss's discussions of such connections as the references of Farabi to Plato, Maimonides to Farabi, Spinoza to Maimonides, or Rousseau to Hobbes.¹³⁴ It is true, however, that the historical character of such connections as Strauss makes between, for example, Machiavelli and Hobbes is open to question.¹³⁵ One should not *assume* connections or make up one's own versions of them on the basis of the assumption that they must exist; one must *establish* them on the basis of evidence. But the remedy is not to replace the dogmatic assumption that the classic authors refer always and exclusively to one another with the even more disastrous one that they refer only to obscure contemporaries. For instance, we should not neglect the fact that Machiavelli's and Hobbes's references are almost exclusively to classic authors, as Strauss pointed out, and insert them instead into a context of our own construction composed of obscure contemporaries whom they never mention or give any sure sign of considering, as Pocock and Skinner do.¹³⁶ One must read a great text in its context, but one must first try to understand what its author understood its context to be.

Admirers of Strauss can learn some good practical lessons from the critique of the traditional canon and of pure textualism offered by the so-called new historians of political theory. These lessons could be learned

from Strauss himself; but they might be overlooked given his emphases, whereas they cannot be overlooked in writings of the new historians. The first of these lessons is that one should not devote all of one's studies, or one's students' studies, to the traditional canon. One should not have to retell this truth to students of an author of interpretations of Xenophon, Farabi, Maimonides, and Halevi. Far from insisting on the context of the canonical tradition, Strauss required that the interpreter "must start from a clear vision, based on Spinoza's explicit statements, of Spinoza's predecessors as seen by Spinoza" and "be willing to attach greater weight to mediocre textbooks quoted by Spinoza than to classics which we cannot be sure that Spinoza has ever known of."

The second lesson is that one cannot understand any book of the past solely by itself. Unlike the textualists with whom he is often confounded, Strauss wrote that, in understanding an author's work, we need "such information as is not supplied by him and as is not easily available to every reasonable reader regardless of time and place." Strauss did warn against the contextualist fallacy of seeing "primarily as a contemporary among his contemporaries" an author whose books are "primarily addressed to posterity." The paucity of reference to obscure contemporaries in such books is explained by the fact that "the flight to immortality requires an extreme discretion in the selection of one's luggage." But Strauss admitted the need for extraneous information inasmuch as "a man's foresight as to what could be intelligible to posterity is necessarily limited." Strauss was clearly aware of the importance of the linguistic-contextualist argument: "Spinoza could not have foreseen, or . . . taken effective protection against the fact that the traditional terminology of philosophy, which he employed while modifying it, would become obsolete. Thus the present-day reader of Spinoza has to learn the rudiments of a language which was familiar to Spinoza's contemporaries." But Strauss, as opposed to the contextualists, insisted that extraneous information, while indispensable, must be strictly subordinate to a framework supplied by the author and "can never be permitted to supply the clue to his teaching except after it has been proved beyond any reasonable doubt that it is impossible to make head and tail of his teaching as he presented it." Otherwise, one tries to understand the author better than he understood himself before one has understood him as he understood himself, and so one understands instead "a figment of one's imagination."¹³⁷

Some of Gunnell's denials suggest that his chief target is the "causal implications" of the tradition. Does he mean that we do not find our ideas mediated by the notions of modern political philosophy? Hobbes and Aristotle both seem to have thought that the natural or prephilosophic view of politics was that politics was concerned with the best way of life,

the virtues of the soul, and right opinions, although Hobbes tried to replace that view with a popular acceptance of the philosophic view that politics is concerned with the guarantee of the individual's right to comfortable preservation. I presume that Gunnell finds as I do, that college freshmen today appear in our classes having "always" "known" the Hobbesian scientific view. Other more sophisticated freshmen have progressed beyond Hobbes to "know" that one cannot speak scientifically of the end of politics at all because that is a matter of one's "values." Gunnell may want to argue that Hobbes or Locke or Nietzsche or Weber did not in some strict sense *cause* us to have these notions instead of the prephilosophic ones, but he can hardly deny that we do start from these notions of the modern political philosophers. We should note that Strauss's strongest statements of "causal implications" pertain to modernity,¹³⁸ the peculiar age in which the characters of both philosophy and politics changed so as to permit permeation of popular understanding by ideas of philosophic origin.¹³⁹

More decisively, Gunnell's denial of the tradition derives from dictionary definitions of the term. He suggests that they imply "a situation where knowledge, belief, or custom is handed down (often orally) through successive generations bound in some common activity or form of social action. The term suggests a body of long-established and generally accepted and authoritative forms of thought and behavior." He also claims that the "unity of theory and practice and the interrelationship of ideas and action . . . which characteristically belong to the meaning of tradition" are essential to the myth he denies.¹⁴⁰ If a tradition is defined to require a unity of theory and practice, and if political philosophy is understood as fundamentally theoretical, then there cannot be a tradition of political philosophy. If a tradition is defined to require a social activity, and if political philosophy is understood as an individual pursuit in isolation from and perhaps even in opposition to society, then by definition a tradition of political philosophy cannot exist.¹⁴¹

Gunnell himself comes surprisingly close to affirming the tradition in the last chapter of his book, where he describes a single pattern of thought and ascribes it to "all political theory" or "every theorist" or "every political theory."¹⁴² He says that it is only "one possible pedagogical recommendation" and an "ideal typification," rather than an account of "preexistent historical objects."¹⁴³ But use of the proper names of Plato, Aristotle, Machiavelli, Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, and Marx makes his claims seem historical and not merely ideal. He admits that his approach "involves both analytical and historical claims."¹⁴⁴ Nor can he be excused on the ground that he does not claim these theorists "intentionally and reflectively participated" in the activity he describes, for the language he employs is precisely that of intention and reflection: "vision," "dream," "seeks," "hope,"

"attempt," "motive," "goal," "serious purpose."¹⁴⁵ He ventures even further, plumbing the psychological states of theorists: "feels the wounds of society," "the fear of reprisal that haunted men such as Hobbes and Locke," "the demands of his psyche."¹⁴⁶ Gunnell even argues that Plato is "the prototypical political theorist" (if not "the initiator of the tradition") and that today we find "the demise of this kind of literature" (if not the end of the tradition), owing to positivism, historicism, etc.¹⁴⁷ Who can deny the tradition?

IV. THE PROBLEM OF TRADITION

One might easily get the impression from Gunnell that Strauss uses the notion of tradition to lend authority and immemoriality to political philosophy as constituting a single tradition. Yet Gunnell's own account of Strauss hardly supports this view of Strauss's usage of the notion of tradition and indeed effectively highlights a quite different set of uses. In most of these, tradition is a pejorative rather than a respectful term. Gunnell shows that Strauss *praised* classical political philosophy as *nontraditional* and that he cast doubt on later understanding *as* traditional.¹⁴⁸ According to Strauss, "the classical philosophers see the political things with a freshness and directness which have never been equalled," whereas later "philosophers' study of political things was mediated by a tradition of political philosophy which acted like a screen between the philosopher and political things."¹⁴⁹

One could question whether the classics were able to perceive political phenomena freshly and directly, unmediated by any tradition, or more generally whether that is ever possible. Such criticism might be understood as coming from a historicist direction. Alternately, one could question whether the moderns were unable to perceive political phenomena freshly and directly, unmediated by any tradition, or more generally whether that is not always possible. Such criticism might be understood as coming from a simple nonhistoricist direction. Either of these criticisms, if substantiated, would obviate this use by Strauss of the notion of tradition and his distinctive claim for classical political philosophy. The peculiar character of Strauss's claim is revealed by its being open to criticism from these two different directions. His position appears to be neither historicist nor in any simple sense, nonhistoricist.

In response to the first criticism, Strauss might have said that, while the classical political philosophers were affected by all sorts of traditions—for example, Athenian political traditions, Greek religious and poetic traditions, and the tradition of philosophy itself—they appear not to have

been confronted with a tradition of specifically political philosophy. Possibly, however, this appearance is merely the result of a lack of historical evidence.¹⁵⁰ In response to the second criticism, Strauss might have cautioned that, while we may conclude from historical studies that the moderns did not break free from their tradition to a fresh view, we cannot and ought not to conclude thereby that they *could* not have done so.

Strauss argued not only that modern political philosophy sees the political phenomena through the lens of tradition but also that the original, undistorted phenomena no longer survive. The primary political phenomena from the analysis of which political philosophy begins are opinions, which are almost inseparable from practices and institutions and ways of life. Speaking of the state rather than the city as a way of understanding political phenomena is almost inseparable from the existence of the state rather than the city.¹⁵¹ "The world in which we live is already a product of science" and no longer "the natural or prescientific world."¹⁵² Therefore, the deliberate transformation of popular opinion and political practice, which Strauss attributed to modern political philosophy, eventually renders it more traditional than classical political philosophy, even long after its origins.

Even where Strauss used the notion of "tradition" nonpejoratively, in claiming that modern political philosophy has made a "break with the whole tradition of political philosophy," he rejected the scholarly notion that "the history of political thought is continuous."¹⁵³ In this fundamental sense, he rejected "the myth of the tradition." This negation points to the notion of the specific traditions of classical political philosophy stemming from Socrates through Xenophon, Plato, and Aristotle to their avowed followers such as Farabi, Maimonides, Aquinas, and Marsilius, united by certain principles such as that the goal of political life is virtue and that the order most conducive to it depends on chance.¹⁵⁴ This notion of a specific and self-conscious tradition is hardly open to the criticism that it is all a myth.

Finally, Strauss suggested that today "the shaking of all traditions" may enable us "to understand in an untraditional or fresh manner what was hitherto only understood in a traditional or derivative manner."¹⁵⁵ Here again, the sense of tradition is pejorative. It suggests the view, which is neither the historicist nor the simple nonhistoricist view, that the discovery of the truth may depend on certain situations.¹⁵⁶ Strauss agreed with historicism that tradition cuts us off from unmediated experience of political phenomena. He rejected the simple nonhistoricist view that direct access to such phenomena is always available, but he suggested that it was available to the classical originators of the tradition and that now, when radical

historicism has shaken all traditions, indirect access is available through historical studies that do not presuppose the truth of historicism.

None of these usages is identical with "the myth of the tradition" criticized by Gunnell; but there is a sense in which they combine to suggest something like that, although with a critical rather than a favorable implication. Description of classical political philosophy as nontraditional in contradistinction to all that came after negates the description of Machiavelli as having effected a break with the whole tradition. Indeed, Strauss made clear that modern political philosophy built on classical political philosophy, at least to the extent of accepting from it the very notion of political—that is, public spirited—philosophy and was thus more traditional at its origins than classical political philosophy was at its origins.¹⁵⁷ The description of Machiavelli as having effected a break with the whole tradition in turn negates the description of classical political philosophy as nontraditional, at least to the extent that it originated a tradition.¹⁵⁸

These negations, and their implications that both ancients and moderns were somehow traditional, might even be said to represent an attempt to understand both ancient and modern political philosophers better than they understood themselves. They underline an apparently unintended effect of classical political philosophy in removing subsequent political philosophers from direct contact with political phenomena.¹⁵⁹ They also suggest that Machiavelli, Hobbes, and their successors accepted the premises of their predecessors without recognizing that those premises were incompatible with their own innovations.

Strauss's view of tradition is problematic: tradition is both an access and an obstacle to understanding. For Strauss, "adopting or clinging to a more or less persistent tradition of philosophy" is no solution because "it is of the essence of traditions that they cover or conceal their humble foundations by erecting impressive edifices on them."¹⁶⁰ Fundamentally, there is something contradictory about a "tradition of philosophy." "Tradition" is the inheritance of things from others, whereas "philosophy" is the effort to know things through one's own reason. "The typical philosopher," Strauss warned, "after having reached maturity of the mind, 'comme un homme qui marche seul et dans les ténèbres,' has to start afresh and to go his own way however much he may be assisted by the exertions of his teachers."¹⁶¹

V. EXOTERIC WRITING AND ESOTERIC READING

Like Skinner¹⁶² and Pocock¹⁶³, Gunnell argues that Strauss's claim about exoteric writing places—indeed is even designed to place—his inter-

pretations "outside the realm of falsification and debate."¹⁶⁴ Just what the force of this argument is supposed to be is difficult to ascertain. Let us approach it in as general and naive a way as possible. Surely it would be easier to understand the meaning of all human utterances if human beings always simply told what they believe to be the truth and never lied, joked, or equivocated. That they do lie, joke, and equivocate makes what they say harder to understand, but it does not render all human utterances incomprehensible or put all interpretations beyond the realm of falsification and debate. Consequently there is no reason why the recognition that the political philosophers in their writings lie, joke, and equivocate should lead to interpretations that cannot or should not be debated. That claims may therefore have to be judged by their plausibility or probability rather than their absolute certainty should encourage rather than foreclose debate, just as in other areas of inquiry.

The difficulty of interpretation, given the possibility of an author's writing other than what he believes to be the truth, received its classical expression from Farabi, one of Strauss's favorite authors. He told the story of a certain ascetic, known for his probity, who escapes from the tyrant of his city by dressing as a vagabond and acting drunk and truthfully identifying himself to the gatekeeper, who thought he must be joking. After telling this story, Farabi explained that:

the wise Plato did not feel free to reveal and uncover the sciences for all men. Therefore he followed the practice of using symbols, riddles, obscurity, and difficulty, so that science would not fall into the hands of those who do not deserve it and be deformed, or into the hands of one who does not know its worth or who uses it improperly. In this he was right. Once he knew and became certain that he had become well-known for this practice, and that all men came to know that this was what he did, he sometimes turned to the subject that he intended to discuss and stated it openly and literally; but the one who reads or hears his discussion thinks that it is symbolic and that he intended something different from what he has stated openly. This notion is one of the secrets of his books. Moreover, no one is able to understand that which he states openly and that which he states symbolically unless he is trained in that art itself, and no one is able to distinguish between the two unless he is skilled in the science being discussed.¹⁶⁵

Hans-Georg Gadamer, who says he "largely agrees" with Strauss's esoteric interpretations and that Strauss "enchants us with many brilliant examples of the deciphering of hidden relationships in the Platonic dialogues," explains that Strauss's "deciphering" interpretations of Plato remain "uncertain" because of Plato's irony.¹⁶⁶ If one cannot understand an author's irony unless one shares his knowledge of the matter, and if one also cannot know one shares his knowledge unless one understands his irony, then

such knowledge may be undemonstrable.¹⁶⁷ As Strauss himself wrote, anyone who presents a written exposition of Plato's teaching "can easily be refuted and confounded by passages in the dialogues which contradict his exposition."¹⁶⁸

Far from foreclosing debate by claiming privileged certainty, Strauss's argument about exoteric writing is an admission of difficulty and a confession of ignorance designed to spur debate about the meaning of philosophic texts, the teachings of which have recently been taken for granted. Strauss wrote of Farabi's convictions concerning a number of important points that "it is not as easy to say what these convictions were as the compilers of textbooks and of most monographs seem to think."¹⁶⁹ He admitted that "the historian who has no illusions about the difference of rank between himself and Plato will be very skeptical in regard to the possibility of his ever reaching adequate understanding of Plato's thought."¹⁷⁰ More generally, he warned that the "truly exact historian will reconcile himself to the fact that there is a difference between winning an argument, or proving to practically everyone that he is right, and understanding the thought of the great writers of the past."¹⁷¹ Not expecting to persuade everyone is very different from refusing to debate with them. More personally, Strauss admitted in a letter to Gadamer that "at least in the most important cases, earlier or contemporary, I have always seen that there remained in the text something of the utmost importance which I did not understand, *i.e.*, that my understanding or my interpretation was very incomplete."¹⁷²

It would be a serious mistake, however, to assume that Strauss's claim about exoteric writing, with its recognition of ignorance and admission of uncertainty, leads to interpretations that are arbitrary or that depend on less exact rules than those used by interpreters who reject Strauss's claim. On the contrary, scholars have always labeled certain statements of philosophical writers as not expressing their serious intentions, whether viewing them as ironical or as slips. Consider how many scholars have taken for granted that Hobbes did not "really mean" his exposition of Christianity or his theological argument for natural law.¹⁷³ Those scholars who have argued that he really meant them have scandalized the scholarly upholders of "near-orthodoxy" almost as much as Strauss has by some of his esoteric interpretations.¹⁷⁴ Or consider how many scholars have taken for granted that Plato did not really mean to make his Socrates endorse the view that philosophers are indifferent to actual politics and to the coming into being of his Republic.¹⁷⁵

The difference is that Strauss proposed that we become less arbitrary and more exact in deciding which statements an author means literally. He even proposed "very specific hermeneutic rules" or "criteria which would allow us to distinguish between guessing and knowing what an author

indicates between the lines."¹⁷⁶ At one point, he presented seven such rules, beginning with: "Reading between the lines is strictly prohibited in all cases where it would be less exact than not doing so."¹⁷⁷ For example, our understanding of an author's intent is more exact if we take seriously his rare or unique but unorthodox statement rather than his frequent but orthodox statements to the contrary, especially if he discusses noble lies, intentional errors, or the like; not to take seriously the unorthodox statement is arbitrary.¹⁷⁸ Of course, the rules Strauss proposed cannot be mechanical or foolproof.

Even if exoteric writing were only a device to avoid persecution, it would succeed only if its esoteric teaching could not be proven in court.¹⁷⁹ But the common view that Strauss's claim about exoteric writing is only a "thesis about the relationship between persecution and political theory" is mistaken.¹⁸⁰ For Strauss, the danger to philosophy is only "the most obvious and the crudest reason" for exoteric writing.¹⁸¹ It is also required for taking one's "social duties seriously."¹⁸² Not merely because society endangers philosophy by persecution but because philosophy endangers society by undermining the opinions on which society is based, must philosophers resort to exoteric teaching.¹⁸³ Exoteric writing is motivated not only by fear for the preservation of philosophy but by "philanthropy."¹⁸⁴ Exoteric writing is also required for the sake of education, that ascent which only the reader can accomplish for himself.¹⁸⁵

Strauss's claim about exoteric writing is not an extraneous device but a corollary to his understandings of philosophy and society. "Philosophy" is the attempt to replace opinion by knowledge, whereas "society" rests on opinion. Philosophy therefore endangers society and must "remain the preserve of a small minority" and "respect the opinions on which society rests."¹⁸⁶ Strauss's claim about esoteric writing is even more closely connected to his understanding of *political philosophy*. According to Gunnell, "Strauss defines political philosophy as an activity that seeks 'to replace opinion about the nature of political things by knowledge of the nature of political things' and, particularly, knowledge of the right political order."¹⁸⁷ But Strauss called this only "our provisional definition of political philosophy."¹⁸⁸ According to it, " 'philosophy' indicates the manner of treatment . . . 'political' indicates both the subject matter and the function."¹⁸⁹ But according to the "deeper meaning of 'political philosophy' . . . the adjective 'political' in the expression 'political philosophy' designates not so much a subject matter as a manner of treatment; from this point of view, I say, 'political philosophy' means primarily not the philosophic treatment of politics, but the political, or popular, treatment of philosophy, or the political introduction to philosophy."¹⁹⁰

Put even more simply, "the exoteric teaching was . . . 'political' philosophy."¹⁹¹ This view of political philosophy and exoteric writing is

characteristic of the ancients as opposed to the moderns.¹⁹² According to Arnaldo Momigliano, Strauss's hermeneutic is tightly linked with his political philosophy and exoteric writing for him is not a merely contingent characteristic to keep in mind in interpreting the classical texts, but the sign of the superiority of classical thought over modern.¹⁹³ Far from denying that "the term 'political philosophy' is problematic"¹⁹⁴ and asserting that all canonical writers participated in the same activity, Strauss implied that the moderns did not characteristically practice political philosophy in its deeper meaning. On an even more fundamental level, Strauss's notion of political philosophy is problematic. An inherent tension seems apparent between the aims and definitions which Strauss presented: between replacing opinion by knowledge of the right political order and respecting the basic opinions of society; between protecting and introducing philosophy; between the philosophic treatment of politics and the political treatment of philosophy.

Strauss's claim about exoteric writing is also linked to his critique of historicism. He argued that the historicist premise that each political philosophy is essentially related to its historical situation tends to blind one to the possibility of exoteric writing. Conversely, the possibility that a political philosopher was merely adapting the expression of his thought and not the thought itself to his historical situation renders doubtful the evidence for historicism, namely the apparent correspondence between political philosophies and their societies.¹⁹⁵ The historicist view that "even the greatest minds cannot liberate themselves from the specific opinions which rule their particular society," according to Strauss, "can be established more easily if all explicit statements of all great thinkers must be taken to express their private thoughts than if this assumption is questioned."¹⁹⁶ As Momigliano writes, "the question to put to oneself is not if the philosophy expresses the surrounding society, but if the surrounding society permits the philosophy to express itself."¹⁹⁷

Leo Strauss was dedicated to freedom of the mind. According to a currently common understanding of freedom of the mind, one shows one's dedication to it by proclaiming heterodox doctrines that attract obloquy or ridicule. No one can doubt that Strauss did so. But for Strauss, such courageous actions were not the greatest of "the sacrifices which we must make so that our minds may be free."¹⁹⁸

VI. INTERPRETATION AND CRITIQUE

Gunnell bases his assertion that Strauss's work is (or is intended to be) not "historical" or "exegetical" but rather "myth" in part on the claim that it "seems to reflect the very historicism which he so vehemently

repudiates."¹⁹⁹ This intriguing claim raises important questions about Strauss's hermeneutic and his understanding of philosophy and history. The crux of Gunnell's argument is that, "despite [Strauss's] stress of separating philosophy and history and distinguishing between interpretation and critique, in his approach, philosophical understanding of politics entirely depends on historical analysis, and interpretations of past thinkers are absolutely inseparable from his critique of the present."²⁰⁰ To judge whether Strauss's practice contradicts his theory in this way, it is necessary to clarify his account of the relationships between philosophy and history and between interpretation and critique.

Gunnell seems to base his argument chiefly on statements by Strauss that "political philosophy is not a historical discipline," that "historicism" is "the assertion that the fundamental distinction between philosophic and historical questions cannot in the last analysis be maintained," and that historicist understanding of the nonhistoricist thought of the past is "a questionable mixture of interpretation and critique."²⁰¹ A closer and fuller examination of Strauss's hermeneutic reveals, however, that the first two statements are provisional ones which Strauss refined in ways decisive for this question and that the third is ambiguous.

I shall first consider the hermeneutic question whether interpretation and critique are separable for Strauss or whether history requires philosophy, before considering whether philosophy requires history. Gunnell's characterization of Strauss's work as not historical seems to depend on understanding Strauss to require a simple separation of interpretation and critique or critique-only-after-interpretation: "once the ideas of the past have been objectively understood, they can then be submitted to a 'philosophic critique concerned exclusively with their truth or falsehood.'" ²⁰² But Strauss's condemnation of a "questionable mixture of interpretation and critique" does not require a simple separation of the two or prohibit their *proper* mixture. Instead, he made a distinction between the "criticism" which is "inseparable from interpretation" and that "criticism" which "interpretation necessarily precedes."²⁰³ First, one must understand fully the sense for Strauss in which criticism is inseparable from interpretation.

A. *The Interpreter's Philosophic Ignorance*

Strauss, maintains that, for interpretation to lead to historical understanding, it must begin with a recognition of the text as something not yet understood. To the pursuit of historical truth, he applied Aristotle's recognition of wonder as the beginning of philosophy: "The beginning of understanding is a sense of the bewildering or strange character of the subject to be understood."²⁰⁴ Strauss applied Socratic recognition of ig-

norance to textual interpretation: before the historian can recover "the signposts" that guided earlier philosophers, he must be "in a condition of utter bewilderment: he finds himself in a darkness that is illumined only by his knowledge that he knows, that is, understands nothing."²⁰⁵ Before Strauss begins to interpret Plato's *Republic*, he makes the following plea: "Let us abandon every pretense to know. Let us admit that the Platonic dialogue is an enigma—something perplexing and to be wondered at."²⁰⁶

This admission of ignorance might seem easy, not entailing the labor of criticism. But Strauss viewed the experience of ignorance or wonder as extraordinarily unusual and difficult, dependent on the prior critical effort to become aware of and to free oneself from the conventional or traditional assumptions about the meaning of the text. A merely inherited opinion about the meaning of a text is not only distinct from, but an obstacle to, acquiring genuine understanding. Strauss wrote of a "conventional" presentation of classical political philosophy:

The convention it follows is the product, or the residue, of the studies made by nineteenth- and twentieth-century classical scholars, as well as of the tradition of classical political philosophy which has never been completely interrupted. Conventions of this kind are necessarily composed of true and false, of profound and superficial, of proved and hypothetical elements. Their greatest danger lies in the fact that they inevitably breed a sense of familiarity that in its turn leads to underestimate the difficulties obstructing the understanding of the subject matter.²⁰⁷

This independence from past scholarship which Strauss regarded as part of genuine interpretation may be the feature of his work which has most irritated other scholars. It is not, however, simple neglect or contempt but criticism, whether explicit or only implicit.

The critical effort needed to attain the experience of ignorance is very great. For "the superficial interpretations which are offered in textbooks and many monographs" are only the "most obvious, although not by any means the most dangerous, impediments to genuine understanding."²⁰⁸ The "modern signposts," with which the historian has "grown familiar since his early childhood"²⁰⁹ and from which he must free himself before he can see how little he knows about old texts or how strange they are, may include such fundamental matters as views of what a book is, how it is supposed to be read, what philosophy is, or whether thought is the expression of a particular society. Sufficient critique to produce a doubt of modernity is needed before we can cease to assume we understand the thought of the past.

No one has done more than Leo Strauss to restore to us a sense of how strange and bewildering are such books as Plato's *Laws*, Maimonides'

Guide of the Perplexed, or Machiavelli's *Discourses on the First Ten Books of Titus Livy*. Why does a book about laws begin with an extensive conversation about wine? Why would someone who claims to have found "new modes and orders" present them in the form of discourses on an ancient history? Strauss brought to the forefront of our attention countless irregular or bizarre details that other scholars have preferred to ignore or even edit out. His students often seem to be distinguished by their failure to know things about the books they have studied that every sophomore "knows."

B. *The Interpreter's Philosophic Incentive*

A second reason for Strauss why criticism is inseparable from interpretation might also be expressed by saying that criticism necessarily precedes interpretation. This necessity means first that the historian is "necessarily a critic. He selects a theme which he believes to be worthwhile: the critical judgment that the theme is worthwhile precedes the interpretation."²¹⁰ This familiar point is of special importance for Strauss. The critical judgment of worth is required not merely for prior selection; it is continuously needed: "It is obvious that one's understanding of the thought of the past will tend to be the more adequate the more one is interested in the thought of the past."²¹¹ One needs an "incentive" to study with "sympathy or care."²¹² A "closeness to the subject" is "indispensable for the true understanding of any book."²¹³ An "antiquarian" or "historical" interest is not sufficient to produce historical understanding; one needs a "passionate interest in earlier views," a "serious willingness to submit to the teaching of earlier thinkers," and a "serious effort at liberation from the prejudices of the present."²¹⁴ In short, one needs a belief in "the immediate philosophic relevance" of the subject, a "philosophic passion," a "philosophic incentive," a "philosophic motive for the genuinely historical effort" to understand the philosophic thought of the past.²¹⁵

A philosophic interest means taking seriously the claim of the thought to be true.²¹⁶ Taking it seriously means "that I can, nay, must accept it as true or reject it as untrue—or make a distinction or recognize my inability to decide and therefore the necessity to think or learn more than I know at present."²¹⁷ As Strauss wrote of the author to whom he devoted his first major study, "the strongest incentive for attempting to understand Spinoza's teaching as Spinoza himself understood it" is "the suspicion that Spinoza's teaching is the true teaching. Without that incentive, no reasonable man would devote all his energy to the understanding of Spinoza, and without such devotion Spinoza's books will never disclose their full meaning."²¹⁸

That historical understanding of the thought of the past requires a philosophical concern with its claim to truth implies that criticism is inseparable from interpretation, but it does not imply that "the historian necessarily criticizes the thought of the past from the point of view of present-day thought." Indeed:

By the very fact that he seriously attempts to understand the thought of the past, he leaves the present. He embarks on a journey whose end is hidden from him. He is not likely to return to the shores of his time as exactly the same man who departed from them. His criticism may very well amount to a criticism of present day thought from the point of view of the thought of the past.²¹⁹

The criticism necessary for interpretation means an openness to change.²²⁰ Dogmatism therefore disables one from adequate historical understanding. "Since the dogmatic historian knows the answer to the philosophic questions before he makes his historical studies, these studies will enhance his erudition but not his wisdom."²²¹ The belief in progress is "probably the most disastrous form of dogmatism" for historical interpretation, but the historicist dogma that the (nonhistoricist) thought of the past was mistaken is also disabling, as is the dogma of the superiority of the ancients to the moderns.²²²

Historical interpretation requires not only a recognition of ignorance but a very special incentive. For Strauss, "it is not enough to say that we can learn something" in making a text the object of our study; it must be able to teach us "important truths, that we need today and that we cannot find in any of our contemporaries."²²³ Only "men living in an age of intellectual decline" or at least those who "regard it as possible" that they live in such an age have a sufficient incentive for historical interpretation of the thought of the past. In such a situation, history "takes on philosophic significance." Therefore, interpretation requires not only philosophic criticism of the claim to truth of the text but a prior philosophic criticism of contemporary thought sufficient at least to provide "good reasons for believing that we can learn something of utmost importance from the thought of the past which we cannot learn from our contemporaries."²²⁴

Such criticism is needed not only as an incentive but also as a protection against tacitly introducing current opinions in the course of interpretation.²²⁵ It is precisely Strauss's concern with the "crisis" of contemporary thought that demands that his interpretation of the thought of the past be genuinely historical and not merely "mythical" or an echo of his own thought.²²⁶

One might indeed wonder, along the lines suggested by Gunnell, whether Leo Strauss or anyone else could be capable of possessing the necessary incentive to interpret very many different writers. Of how many

writers can one have the suspicion that their teaching is *the* true one? The question takes on special weight with regard to the moderns, whose teachings Strauss came to suspect were *not* true ones. Perhaps his fundamental interpretations of the moderns antedated that suspicion and formed its basis. The man Allan Bloom calls "the pre-Straussean Strauss"²²⁷ wrote books on Spinoza and Hobbes, started from the belief that "a return to premodern philosophy is impossible," and did not read literally enough.²²⁸ Strauss's one mature book on a modern writer ends with a consideration of what "essential defect of classical philosophy" gave rise to modernity.²²⁹ Although suspicion that a teaching is the true one is the strongest incentive for its study, there are other strong incentives, such as suspicion that it provides the best criticism of the teaching one suspects is true.

C. *The Interpreter's Philosophic Activity*

A third reason for Strauss why criticism is inseparable from interpretation is that philosophical concern with the text's claim to truth is necessary not only as an incentive for, but as a part of, the activity of interpretation. Strauss indicated the most fundamental reason for this necessity as follows:

Plato's thought claims to be an imitation of the whole [one of the Greek ways of referring to the "universe" or "cosmos"] It is impossible to understand the imitation without looking at the original To look at the original in compliance with the directives supplied by the imitation means to try to understand the whole as Plato understood it. To understand the whole as Plato understood it is the goal of the interpretation of Plato's work The attempt to understand Plato's thought as Plato understood it is inseparable from criticism.²³⁰

Since thought presents itself not as an object of study but as an account of other objects of study, it cannot be understood without reference to those objects. If those objects were only particulars, then only additional historical activity would be required; but if they are universals or even the whole, then a philosophical concern with the objects of the text, guided by the text, is required for interpretation. Strauss distinguished it from the philosophical concern with the objects of the text which is subsequent to interpretation and necessarily free to disregard the text's directives.²³¹

Strauss argued that it is "impossible to understand what Plato thought without thinking, i.e., without articulating the subjects about which Plato thought."²³² One must *think* the thought, experience its logical connection (or lack thereof) and not merely repeat its terms.²³³ One must even go beyond the internal logical connection and think about the boundaries of the thought, its starting points and its end points:

If Plato took something for granted which we are in the habit of doubting or even of denying, or if he did not push the analysis of a given subject beyond a certain point, we must regard it as possible that he had good reasons for stopping where he stopped. If it is necessary to understand Plato's thought, it is necessary to understand it as Plato understood it, and therefore it is necessary to stop where he stopped and to look around: perhaps we shall gradually understand his reasons for stopping.²³⁴

The necessity of critical or philosophical activity is increased by the literary character shared to different degrees and purposes by most of the writings which Strauss interpreted. Strauss wrote that "no interpretation of Plato's teaching can be proved fully by historical evidence. For the crucial part of his interpretation the interpreter has to fall back on his own resources: Plato does not relieve him of the responsibility for discovering the decisive part of the argument by himself."²³⁵ Where Plato refused to give part of an argument, the interpreter must discover it by himself, though guided by Plato's hints; he must use Plato's writings for philosophizing.²³⁶ Not only Plato's reticence but his irony compels his interpreter to think for himself. He must try to discover why one character makes a certain argument to another in certain circumstances and what would be a more adequate argument free from the requirements of those characters and circumstances.²³⁷ Apart from Plato's particular dramatic method, exoteric writing in general requires its interpreter to think whether its arguments are good and how they can be corrected. Even, and perhaps especially, the exoteric teaching requires the reader to meet the author "half-way."²³⁸ Concealment can also compel the reader to think by himself and thereby become the author's "accomplice" and not merely his interpreter.²³⁹

It is an exaggeration to claim, as Gunnell does, that Strauss "has little to say about the criteria of interpretation" or that "nowhere" does he set forth "anything approaching a general theory of textual interpretation or principles of hermeneutical historiography that would give substance to his demand for objectivity."²⁴⁰ But it is true that Strauss's hermeneutic is not a general theory of textual interpretation. Strauss admitted to Gadamer that, "not only is my own hermeneutic experience very limited—the experience which I possess makes me doubtful whether a universal hermeneutic theory which is more than 'formal' or external is possible."²⁴¹ Strauss offers at most a theory of the interpretation of philosophic texts. His concern is not with authors in general: "The meaning of 'an author' is so vague. Things which are true of the highest intellects are wholly inapplicable to others."²⁴² Strauss is concerned especially with those "careful philosophers" who were also "careful writers."²⁴³ Perhaps only such writings are fully intelligible, however.

VII. HISTORY AND PHILOSOPHY

Having seen that history or interpretation requires philosophy or criticism for Strauss, I must now ask whether philosophy requires history for him. The hermeneutic question need arise only if a serious need exists for interpretation in the first place. Gunnell is correct that Strauss stated the fundamental distinction between philosophy and history, but Strauss proceeded to modify those provisional general statements. Gunnell's own account of Strauss reveals that Strauss's view of the relation of philosophy and history is more complex than Gunnell assumes for the purpose of his argument that Strauss's history must be myth. According to Gunnell, "Strauss realizes the paradox in his insistence, on the one hand, that political philosophy is a nonhistorical activity and his contention, on the other hand, that historical studies are required to recover political philosophy. He admits that this inevitable tension makes it difficult to maintain the necessary separation between philosophy and history." Gunnell claims that, perhaps even more paradoxically, Strauss's "own history aims, in part at exposing the error of what amounts to a denial of 'the fundamental distinction between philosophic and historical questions.'" Nevertheless, in his subsequent argument, Gunnell refers simply to Strauss's "stress on separating philosophy and history."²⁴⁴

One ought to note first that even an insistence on *distinguishing* between philosophy and history would not necessarily imply any possibility or necessity of *separating* them.²⁴⁵ Even where stating the fundamental distinction between the two as quoted by Gunnell, Strauss made clear that political philosophy always depends on some history for "the experience of the variety of political institutions and convictions." But that history is "only preliminary and auxiliary to political philosophy; it does not form an integral part of it."²⁴⁶

In our time, however, the dependence of political philosophy on history is far more fundamental. Political philosophy today needs its own history "as an integral part of its own efforts," Strauss concluded at the end of the essay that begins with the statement of the fundamental distinction between the two.²⁴⁷ Elsewhere, Strauss warned strikingly that "insistence on the fundamental difference between philosophy and history—a difference by which philosophy stands or falls—may very well, in the present situation, be misleading, not to say dangerous to philosophy itself."²⁴⁸ To begin with, historicism itself "creates an entirely new situation for political philosophy."²⁴⁹ In that situation, the impossibility of philosophy appears practically "manifest to every child," and so "the original meaning of philosophy is accessible only through recollection of what philosophy meant in the past, i.e., for all practical purposes, only through the reading of old books,"

through history. Philosophy is no longer in its "natural situation" of confrontation with nonphilosophic accounts of the whole, but in an artificial situation of confrontation with denial of the possibility of an account of the whole by what appears to be almost a philosophy.²⁵⁰ Strauss expressed this situation in a Platonic image: philosophy instead of starting in "the natural cave" that Plato confronted now begins from an artificial cave "beneath the cave." To get from there merely to the natural cave requires an elaborate artificial historical investigation.²⁵¹

In a sense, historicism is self-fulfilling, rendering human thought historical by making it seem impossible to think otherwise than historically.²⁵² Even the escape from historicism is doubly historical, requiring historical investigations made necessary by this historical situation. But the recognition that historicism has made itself practically true for a time, or that "the fusion of philosophic and historical questions" is in a limited way "inevitable" for us, is not identical with historicism itself, however much it may differ from simple nonhistoricism.²⁵³ For Strauss not only emphatically denied that his enormous historical achievement renders him superior to the classical philosophers who had no need of it or even to the "ancestral cave-dwellers" but affirmed that philosophy has not changed—only the introduction to it has.²⁵⁴ His historical studies are meant to support his philosophic questioning of historicism's claim to express the "experience of history."²⁵⁵ One might ask whether, after Strauss's own historical situation, philosophy has been able to think its way out of historicism, as well as positivism, without reliance on historical studies. But one might also ask whether mere denial of historicism, unaccompanied by such historical studies, provides liberation from the opinions of our historical situation.

The necessity of historical investigation can be clarified in two ways. The first is closely linked to Strauss's uses of the notion of tradition. Our ideas are of an especially traditional character: presupposing progress, they bury their own foundations.²⁵⁶ Philosophy never starts from scratch but, rather, from the clarification of the opinions with which we begin. Philosophy today must clarify opinions that can be clarified only historically. Classical political philosophy could dispense with such history because it confronted the "natural" understanding of political things, or "the understanding of political things which belongs to political life."²⁵⁷ Accordingly, Strauss's historical investigations of the classical political philosophers have the character not so much of expounding their systems or doctrines as of articulating their confrontation with that prephilosophic understanding.

This project may well remind one of the phenomenology of Strauss's teacher Husserl and the "*Destruktion*" of his teacher Heidegger, to whom Strauss acknowledged his debts.²⁵⁸ Its peculiar emphasis on the necessity

of historical investigations should be regarded not as misinterpretation of Husserl,²⁵⁹ but as the result of Strauss's reflections on his own hermeneutic situation and activity.

The second way of clarifying the necessity of history for us is by viewing it as "the self-destruction of historicism."²⁶⁰ Like Nietzsche, Strauss insisted on applying historicism to itself,²⁶¹ which requires a nonhistoricist account of the genesis of historicism.²⁶² Historical understanding of non-historicist thought frees one from historicism, at least to the extent of enabling one to see its problematic character, which is all that is required for the possibility of philosophy.²⁶³ Hermeneutic experience is liberating because it reveals both the nonhistoricist alternative one interprets and one's own capacity for genuine historical understanding.²⁶⁴

Strauss forced historians "to begin to wonder whether the historical truth is not as difficult of access as the philosophic truth."²⁶⁵ And for Strauss, the philosophic truth is fundamentally problematic:

Philosophy as such is nothing but genuine awareness of the problems, i.e., of the fundamental and comprehensive problems. It is impossible to think about these problems without becoming inclined toward a solution, toward one or the other of the very few typical solutions. Yet as long as there is no wisdom but only quest for wisdom, the evidence of all solutions is necessarily smaller than the evidence of the problems. Therefore the philosopher ceases to be a philosopher at the moment at which the "subjective certainty" of a solution becomes stronger than his awareness of the problematic character of that solution. At that moment the sectarian is born.²⁶⁶

It is precisely the fundamentally problematic character of the philosophic truth that makes history of philosophy possible.²⁶⁷

Notes

1. Cf. MT; PT. The treatment of Strauss is more extensive in the article than the book, but the book is a useful supplement. An earlier version of the essay at hand was delivered at the 1979 Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association at a panel on "Interpreting Political Theory," chaired by John Gunnell. In revising it, I have benefitted from the criticisms of Christopher Bruell, David Greenstone, and Ira Katznelson. A shorter version appeared in *Polity*, 16, 1, Fall, 1983.

2. MT, 122.

3. MT, 123.

4. MT, 122.

5. MT, 130-132. Cf. PT, 12-22, 34-59, 69-90.
6. MT, 122; PT, 66-67.
7. MT, 122. Cf. MT, 131.
8. MT, 132.
9. MT, 122, 131.
10. MT, 131.
11. MT, 122, 131-132; PT, 34-35, 58.
12. MT, 132-133; PT, 90.
13. MT, 133.
14. MT, 123-125.
15. MT, 125-126.
16. MT, 127.
17. MT, 127-129
18. MT, 127.
19. MT, 130.
20. MT, 130-131. Cf. PT, 68.
21. MT, 132.
22. MT, 133.
23. MT, 132-133. Cf. PT, 80-82. Gunnell is tentative about the affinity with Heidegger in the book and omits it in the article.
24. MT, 131, 133-134.
25. PT, 37. Cf. MT, 132.
26. Leo Strauss, "Introduction," in *History and Political Philosophy*, Leo Strauss and Joseph Cropsey, eds., Chicago, Rand McNally, second edition, 1972, 1-6, on 1-2.
27. *Ibid.*, 4.
28. Leo Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1953, 120. Cf. Strauss, *Socrates and Aristophanes*, New York, Basic Books, 1966, 3; Strauss, *Xenophon's Socratic Discourse*, Ithaca, NY, Cornell University Press, 1970, 83.
29. Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, 118-119.
30. Leo Strauss, *The City and Man*, Chicago, Rand McNally, 1964, 13-17. Cf. Leo Strauss, *Liberalism Ancient and Modern*, New York, Basic Books, 1968, 32-33, 45-50, 53-63.

31. Strauss, *The City and Man*, 17-23.
32. MT, 127.
33. Strauss, *The City and Man*, 10.
34. *Ibid.*, 11.
35. Leo Strauss, "Epilogue," in *Essays on the Scientific Study of Politics*, New York, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1962, 305-327, on 313.
36. PT, 39.
37. Leo Strauss, *What is Political Philosophy?* New York, Free Press, 1959, 68-69.
38. *Ibid.*, 64. Cf. MT, 127.
39. Leo Strauss, "On a New Interpretation of Plato's Political Philosophy," *Social Research*, 13, 3, September, 1946, 326-367, on 326. Cf. Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, 7-8; Strauss, *What Is Political Philosophy?* 172-173.
40. Strauss, "On a New Interpretation of Plato's Political Philosophy," 332.
41. Cf. J.G.A. Pocock, "Prophet and Inquisitor: Or, a Church Built upon Bayonets Cannot Stand: A Comment on Mansfield's 'Strauss's Machiavelli,'" *Political Theory*, 3, 4, November, 1975, 385-401, on 387, 391.
42. Cf. Quentin Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought, Volume One: The Renaissance*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1978, 137.
43. MT, 129; PT, 40.
44. Leo Strauss, *Thoughts on Machiavelli*, Seattle, University of Washington Press, 1969, 12-13.
45. The frequency with which this book is summarized as arguing that Machiavelli was a teacher of evil suggests that many readers read books as if they do not read beyond their first sentences. Cf. Leo Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing*, Glencoe, IL, Free Press, 1952, 25.
46. Strauss, *Thoughts on Machievlli*, 9-10, 12. Cf. Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing*, 25.
47. *Ibid.*, 78.
48. *Ibid.*, 16, 62-65, 185; Strauss, "On a New Interpretation of Plato's Political Philosophy," 353.
49. MT, 128.
50. Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, 252-253.
51. Strauss, *What is Political Philosophy?* 50.
52. Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, 267-282.

53. Leo Strauss, *Political Philosophy*, Hilail Gilden, ed., Indianapolis, IN, Pegasus, 1975, 98.
54. Strauss, *What Is Political Philosophy?* 55. Cf. *ibid.*, 27.
55. Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, 31. Cf. Leo Strauss, "An Unspoken Prologue to a Public Lecture at St. John's," *The College*, 30, 3, January, 1979, 30-31, on 31.
56. Cf. Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, 125-126 and 226-227.
57. MT, 132-133. Note Gunnell's mention of Strauss's "wave" metaphor: MT, 133. Gunnell seems to attribute to Strauss the view that historicism "constitutes 'the spirit of our time,' " omitting the qualification by which Strauss distanced himself from historicism: "as far as we can speak at all of the spirit of a time." (MT, 124; Strauss, *What Is Political Philosophy?*, 57.) Cf. *ibid.*, 58.
58. Strauss, *What Is Political Philosophy?*, 60.
59. MT, 127.
60. Strauss, *What Is Political Philosophy?*, 172.
61. Strauss, *Liberalism Ancient and Modern*, vii; Strauss, *Political Philosophy*, 98.
62. MT, 123-124; PT, 37-38.
63. Strauss, *The City and Man*, 3; Strauss, "The Crisis of Our Time," in *The Predicament of Modern Politics*, Harold J. Spaeth, ed., Detroit, University of Detroit Press, 1964, 41-54, on 42, 44.
64. Strauss, *The City and Man*, 3; Strauss, "The Crisis of Our Time," 42-44.
65. Strauss, *Political Philosophy*, 98.
66. Strauss, *The City and Man*, 3.
67. Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, 1-2.
68. Strauss, *The City and Man*, 3. For the likelihood that the allusion is to Locke, cf. Strauss, "The Crisis of Our Time," 45; Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, 165; Strauss, *What Is Political Philosophy?*, 49.
69. Leo Strauss, "Quelques remarques sur la science politique de Hobbes," *Recherches Philosophiques*, 2, 1933, 690-622, on 609; my translation.
70. Strauss, "The Crisis of Our Time," 42. Cf. Strauss, "On a New Interpretation of Plato's Political Philosophy," 327.
71. Strauss, "The Crisis of Our Time," 43.
72. Strauss, *The City and Man*, 1-2, 4-8; Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, 1-4; Strauss, *What Is Political Philosophy?*, 17-18, 26-27; Strauss, *Political Philosophy*, 98.
73. On page 123 of MT, note Gunnell's substitution of "modern liberalism" for Strauss's "liberal relativism" distinguished from "natural right (Lockean) liberalism": Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, 5-6.

74. PT, 73; MT, 130.
75. Strauss, *The City of Man*, 11; MT, 126.
76. Strauss, "On a New Interpretation of Plato's Political Philosophy," 332-333.
77. PT, 125; Strauss, *What Is Political Philosophy?*, 265.
78. *Ibid.*, 265.
79. For example, cf. James Steintrager's defense of Strauss against a number of writers who accuse him of being closed to divine revelation and even against the accusations of atheism and moral relativism: "Political Philosophy, Political Theology, and Morality," *Thomist*, 32, 3, July, 1968, 307-332. Also cf. Daniel Oliver's characterization of Strauss as "one of this generation's great conservative thinkers" to Werner J. Dannhauser's presentation of Strauss as a critic of conservatism: Oliver, "In This Issue. . .," *National Review*, 25, December 7, 1973, 1326; Dannhauser, *National Review*, "The Achievement of Leo Strauss, IV," *National Review*, 25, December 7, 1973, 1355-1357.
80. PT, 72.
81. Cf. Strauss, "Quelques remarques sur la science politique de Hobbes," 622; Strauss, *The Political Philosophy of Hobbes*, Elsa M. Sinclair, trans., Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1963, vii-viii; PT, 4-11.
82. MT, 122-123, 130, 131-132, 133; PT, xx, 27, 36, 57-59, 68-70.
83. PT, 39. Cf. PT, 52-53, 89, 142.
84. MT, 131. Cf. PT, 85.
85. Strauss, *Thoughts on Machiavelli*, 14.
86. MT, 122-123, 131; PT, 69.
87. Strauss, *What Is Political Philosophy?*, 265. Cf. Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing*, 30.
88. Strauss, *The City and Man*, 50.
89. Strauss, *Thoughts on Machiavelli*, 24, 55-56, 62.
90. Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing*, 78-94.
91. MT, 133.
92. MT, fn. 80; PT, 75, fn. 12. Both passages cite: Strauss, "Farabi's Plato," *Louis Ginzberg Jubilee Volume*, New York, American Academy for Jewish Research, 1945, 357-393, on 376-377.
93. Victor Gourevitch, "Philosophy and Politics, I," *Review of Politics*, 22, 1, September, 1968, 58-84, on 61. This quotes: Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing*, 14. This is a passage similar to the one Gunnell quotes from: Strauss, "Farabi's Plato."

94. PT, 102, 119-122.
95. MT, 133.
96. Strauss, *The Political Philosophy of Hobbes*, xv-xvi.
97. *Ibid.*; Leo Strauss, "Walker's Machiavelli," *Review of Metaphysics*, 6, 3, March, 1953, 437-446, on 440; Strauss, *Thoughts on Machiavelli*, 54-55, 85-86.
98. PT, 73. Cf. MT, 131, 133.
99. MT, 132, Cf. PT, 70-71.
100. MT, 128.
101. John Locke, *Some Thoughts concerning Education*, #1.
102. Plato, *Republic*, 491a, 493a-494a, 496a-d, 516c-d.
103. PT, 87-88.
104. PT, 88.
105. PT.
106. MT, 133.
107. MT, 134.
108. PT, 66.
109. PT, 85.
110. PT, 87.
111. PT, 134.
112. MT, 122, abstract.
113. MT, 122.
114. MT, 131.
115. MT, 132.
116. MT, 133-134.
117. PT, xx.
118. PT, xxii.
119. PT, 34.
120. PT, 66.
121. PT, 69.
122. PT, 70.
123. PT, 85.
124. PT, 86-87.

125. PT, 90.
126. PT, 90.
127. PT, 135.
128. PT, 134.
129. On analytical traditions, cf. PT, xxii, 86-87, 136.
130. MT, 131.
131. PT, 88.
132. MT, 132, 131; PT, 134, 66.
133. MT, 131.
134. Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing*, 9-18, 21, 47, 181, 182, 187, 198; Strauss, "Farabi's Plato," 357; Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, 266.
135. *Ibid.*, 177-182; Strauss, *What Is Political Philosophy?*, 47-49; Strauss, *Studies in Platonic Political Philosophy*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1983, 212.
136. Cf. Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, 267-268; Strauss, *Thoughts on Machiavelli*, 59, 224-225, 290-291, 293-294; Strauss, "Machiavelli and Classical Literature," *Review of National Literatures*, 1, 1, Spring, 1970, 7-25; J.G.A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment*, Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press, 1975; Quentin Skinner, "The Ideological Context of Hobbes's Political Thought," *Historical Journal*, 9, 3, 1966, 286-317. On Pocock and Skinner, cf. my review of Pocock's *Machiavellian Moment*, *Political Science Quarterly*, 91, 2, Summer, 1976, 380-382; "Political Thought in Early Modern Europe II: The Age of Reformation," *Journal of Modern History*, 54, 1, March, 1982, 56-65; "Quentin Skinner's Method and Machiavelli's Prince," *Ethics*, 92, 4, July, 1982, 692-709.
137. Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing*, 159-161.
138. Strauss, *What Is Political Philosophy?*, 46-47; Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, 165, 169; Strauss, *Political Philosophy*, 89. But cf. Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing*, 21; Strauss, *On Tyranny*, Glencoe, IL, Free Press, 220.
139. Strauss in Jacob Klein and Leo Strauss, "A Giving of Accounts," *The College*, 22, 1, April, 1970, 1-5, on 4.
140. PT, 88-89.
141. Cf. Strauss, *What Is Political Philosophy?*, 221-222.
142. PT, 156, 158, 159.
143. PT, 135.
144. PT, 136.
145. PT, 136, 138, 141, 144, 145, 147, 148.
146. PT, 142, 143, 152, 155.

147. PT, 136-137, 159-161.
148. MT, 27-28.
149. Strauss, *What Is Political Philosophy?*, 27. Cf. *ibid.*, 28, 74-75, 78-79.
150. Strauss, *Liberalism Ancient and Modern*, 32-33.
151. Strauss, *What Is Political Philosophy?*, 64-66, 74.
152. Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, 79.
153. MT, 128; Strauss, *What Is Political Philosophy?*, 40; Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing*, 27.
154. Strauss, *What Is Political Philosophy?*, 34-35, 40-41, 85-86; Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, 129-134, 138-143, 178; Strauss, *Political Philosophy*, 84.
155. MT, 126; Strauss, *The City and Man*, 9.
156. Strauss, *What Is Political Philosophy?*, 64, 68-69.
157. Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, 166-169. Cf. Strauss, *The City and Man*, 3; Strauss, *What Is Political Philosophy?*, 78-79.
158. Cf. Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing*, 21; Strauss, *On Tyranny*, 20; Strauss, *What Is Political Philosophy?*, 78. Also cf. Victor Gourevitch, "Philosophy and Politics, II," *Review of Metaphysics*, 22, 2, December, 1968, 281-328, on 321-322.
159. Cf. Strauss, *What Is Political Philosophy?*, 78.
160. Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, 31.
161. Strauss, "Farabi's Plato," 376. Cf. Strauss, "Correspondence Concerning *Wahrheit und Methode*," *Independent Journal of Philosophy*, 2, 1978, 5-12, on 6; Strauss, "On Collingwood's Philosophy of History," *Review of Metaphysics*, 5, 4, June, 1952, 559-586, on 570; Strauss *What Is Political Philosophy?*, 76-77.
162. Cf. Quentin Skinner, "Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas," *History and Theory*, 8, 1, 1969, 3-53, on 21.
163. Cf. Pocock, "Prophet and Inquisitor," 385, 391-395.
164. MT, 130-131. Cf. PT, 73.
165. Alfarabi, "Plato's Laws," in *Medieval Political Philosophy*, Ralph Lerner and Muhsin Mahdi, eds., New York, Free Press, 1963, 71-93, on 84-85. Cf. Strauss, *What Is Political Philosophy?*, 135-137; Niccolo Machiavelli, quoted in Strauss, *Thoughts on Machiavelli*, 36.
166. Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, Garret Barden and John Cumming, eds., New York, Seabury Press, (1960, 1965), trans. from the second edition, 1975, 487-488.
167. Cf. Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing*, 107.
168. Strauss, "On a New Interpretation of Plato's Political Philosophy," 351.

169. Strauss, "Farabi's Plato," 393.
170. Strauss, "On Collingwood's Philosophy of History," 584.
171. Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing*, 30. Cf. Strauss, "The Spirit of Sparta or the Taste of Xenophon," 532.
172. Strauss, "Correspondence Concerning *Wahrheit und Methode*," 6.
173. Cf. J.G.A. Pocock, *Politics, Language and Time*, New York, Atheneum Press, 1971, 160–162. Apart from Strauss, who argued but did not claim to prove that Hobbes was an atheist, the outstanding exception of a scholar who does not take for granted whether Hobbes meant these arguments is Michael Oakeshott, who argues that Hobbes had "an esoteric and an exoteric doctrine" like Plato, Machiavelli, and "even Bentham": Oakeshott, *Hobbes on Civil Association*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1975, 104–119. Cf. Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, 199n.
174. Cf. Pocock, *Politics, Language and Time*, 161.
175. Plato, *Republic*, 592ab. Cf. Strauss, *The City and Man*, 121–128.
176. Strauss, "On a New Interpretation of Plato's Political Philosophy," 351–352; Strauss, *What Is Political Philosophy?*, 224.
177. Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing*, 30.
178. *Ibid.*, 30, 32, 184–186: Strauss, *What Is Political Philosophy?*, 231.
179. Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing*, 25–26.
180. MT, 130–131. Cf. PT, 73; Skinner, "Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas," 21–22.
181. Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing*, 17. The frequency with which this book is summarized with attention only to persecution and not to the other reasons for exoteric writing suggests that many readers read books as if they do not read beyond their titles. Cf. Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing*, 25.
182. *Ibid.*, 183.
183. Strauss, *What Is Political Philosophy?*, 221–222. Cf. Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing*, 34–35.
184. Strauss, "Farabi's Plato," 378.
185. Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing*, 37. Strauss, *Thoughts on Machiavelli*, 50; Strauss, "The Spirit of Sparta or the Taste of Xenophon," *Social Research*, 6, 4, November, 1939, 502–536, 535.
186. Strauss, *What Is Political Philosophy?*, 221–222. Cf. *ibid.*, 227; Strauss, *On Tyranny*, 26; Strauss, *Liberalism Ancient and Modern*, viii; Strauss, "A Giving of Accounts," 4.
187. PT, 37. Cf. MT, 124.
188. Strauss, *What Is Political Philosophy?*, 14. Cf. *ibid.*, 10–11.

189. *Ibid.*, 10.
190. *Ibid.*, 93–94. Cf. Gourevitch, “Philosophy and Politics, I,” 64–65.
191. Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing*, 18.
192. *Ibid.*, 33–35. Cf. Strauss, “A Giving of Accounts,” 4.
193. Arnaldo Momigliano, “Ermeneutica e Pensiero Politico Classico in Leo Strauss,” *Revista Storica Italiana*, 79, 1967, 1164–1172, on 1168.
194. MT, 133–134.
195. Strauss, *What Is Political Philosophy?*, 63–64.
196. *Ibid.*, 227.
197. Momigliano, “Ermeneutica e Pensiero Politico Classico in Leo Strauss,” 1167, my translation. Cf. Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing*, 7–8.
198. Strauss, *The Political Philosophy of Hobbes*, xvi. Cf. Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing*, 56; Strauss, *On Tyranny*, 27.
199. MT, 133. Cf. MT, 131–132; PT, 72–76.
200. MT, 133. Cf. PT, 74.
201. MT, 125–126. This quotes: Strauss, *What Is Political Philosophy?*, 56–57; Strauss, *On Tyranny*, 24. On page 28 of PT, Gunnell supports a similar statement by reference to: Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, 31. The relevant statement there would seem to be: “Nothing ought to be said or done which could create the impression that unbiased reconsideration of the most elementary premises of philosophy is a merely academic or historical affair.” But a consideration may be in some way or degree historical without being “merely” historical.
202. MT, 126. This quotes: Strauss, *What Is Political Philosophy?*, 66.
203. Strauss, “On Collingwood’s Philosophy of History,” 583–584.
204. Strauss, *What Is Political Philosophy?*, 297; Strauss, *Studies in Platonic Political Philosophy*, 216.
205. Strauss, “On a New Interpretation of Plato’s Political Philosophy,” 331.
206. Strauss, *The City and Man*, 55.
207. Strauss, *What Is Political Philosophy?*, 296–297.
208. Strauss, “On a New Interpretation of Plato’s Political Philosophy,” 331.
209. *Ibid.*
210. Strauss, “On Collingwood’s Philosophy of History,” 582.
211. Strauss, “On a New Interpretation of Plato’s Political Philosophy,” 329; Cf. Strauss, *What Is Political Philosophy?*, 67.
212. *Ibid.*, 229.

213. Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing*, 55.
214. *Ibid.*, 8; Strauss, *What Is Political Philosophy?*, 266.
215. Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing*, 8; Strauss, "On a New Interpretation of Plato's Political Philosophy," 329, 332, 331.
216. Strauss, *What Is Political Philosophy?*, 144.
217. Strauss, "Correspondence Concerning *Wahrheit und Methode*," 6.
218. Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing*, 151-152.
219. Strauss, "On Collingwood's Philosophy of History," 583. Cf. Strauss, "On a New Interpretation of Plato's Political Philosophy," 331.
220. Strauss, *On Tyranny*, 197-198; Strauss, *What Is Political Philosophy?*, 144. But unlike Gadamer, who also insists on application of the text to the interpreter's situation or the "fusion of horizons," Strauss found it "hard to say that Plato's horizon is enlarged if a modification of his doctrine proves to be superior to his own version." (Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 267-276, 324-325; Strauss, "Correspondence Concerning *Wahrheit und Methode*," 6.)
221. Strauss, *What Is Political Philosophy?*, 266.
222. *Ibid.*, 66-68, 71; Strauss, "On Collingwood's Philosophy of History," 574-575; Strauss, "On a New Interpretation of Plato's Political Philosophy," 329-331, 332.
223. Strauss, "Quelques remarques sur la science politique de Hobbes," 610.
224. Strauss, "On Collingwood's Philosophy of History," 576, 585. Cf. Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing*, 152-154.
225. Strauss, "On a New Interpretation of Plato's Political Philosophy," 328-329, 355.
226. Strauss, "Quelques remarques sur la science politique de Hobbes," 610-611.
227. Allan Bloom, "Leo Strauss," *Political Theory*, 2, 4, November, 1974, 372-392, 383. Cf. Strauss, *Socrates and Aristophanes*, 4.
228. Leo Strauss, *Spinoza's Critique of Religion*, New York, Schocken Books, 1965, 31; Strauss, *The Political Philosophy of Hobbes*, xvi.
229. Strauss, *Thoughts on Machiavelli*, 298-299.
230. Strauss, "On Collingwood's Philosophy of History," 583.
231. *Ibid.*, 583-584.
232. *Ibid.*, 584.
233. Cf. *ibid.*, 582.
234. *Ibid.*, 585.
235. Strauss, "On a New Interpretation of Plato's Political Philosophy," 351.

236. *Ibid.*
237. *Ibid.*, 352; Strauss, *The City and Man*, 59–60.
238. Strauss, "Farabi's Plato," 387.
239. Strauss, *Thoughts on Machiavelli*, 50.
240. MT, 130–131; PT, 73.
241. Strauss, "Correspondence Concerning *Wahrheit und Methode*," 5–6. Note Gadamer's response on 9.
242. Strauss, *What Is Political Philosophy?*, 224.
243. *Ibid.*, 230.
244. MT, 126, 133.
245. Cf. Strauss, "On Collingwood's Philosophy of History," 583.
246. Strauss, *What Is Political Philosophy?*, 56–57.
247. *Ibid.*, 77.
248. Strauss, "On a New Interpretation of Plato's Political Philosophy," 532.
249. Strauss, *What Is Political Philosophy?*, 57.
250. Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing*, 156–157.
251. *Ibid.*, 155–156. Strauss expressed this thought in this image already in his review of his teacher, Julius Ebbinghaus's work: *Über die Fortschritte der Metaphysik*, in *Deutsche Literaturzeitung*, 52, December 27, 1931, columns 2451–2453.
252. Strauss, *What Is Political Philosophy?*, 71; Strauss, *On Tyranny*, 27.
253. Strauss, *What Is Political Philosophy?*, 77.
254. *Ibid.*; Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing*, 155–156.
255. Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, 20–24, 31–33. Cf. James F. Ward, "Experience and Political Philosophy: Notes on Reading Leo Strauss," *Polity*, 13, 4, Summer, 1981, 668–687, on 683–686.
256. Strauss, *What Is Political Philosophy?*, 73–76.
257. Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, 79–81; Strauss, *The City and Man*, 11–12.
258. Strauss, *What Is Political Philosophy?*, 248; Strauss, "A Giving of Accounts," 2–3; Strauss, "An Unspoken Prologue to a Public Lecture at St. John's," 31.
259. Cf. Hwa Yol Jung, "The Life-World, Historicity, and Truth: Reflections on Leo Strauss's Encounter with Heidegger and Husserl," *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology*, 9, 1, January, 1978, 11–25, on 17–18.
260. Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing*, 158.

261. Strauss, *What Is Political Philosophy?*, 72-73, 77. Cf. Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, 26.
262. *Ibid.*, 33. This should be distinguished from a historicist account of the genesis of historicism, such as Pocock attempts.
263. Strauss, *On Tyranny*, 24; Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, 32.
264. *Ibid.*, 13, 23.
265. Strauss, *What Is Political Philosophy?*, 232.
266. Strauss, *On Tyranny*, 210. Cf. Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, 32; Strauss, *What Is Political Philosophy?*, 39.
267. *Ibid.*, 228-229.

CHAPTER V

Rigidities in the Study of Political Theory

GEORGE KATEB

John Gunnell's *Political Theory: Tradition and Interpretation* is a book full of provocations. It has aroused, and is likely to continue to arouse, ire and combativeness in various students of political theory. Even if spared direct attack, one may nevertheless take serious objection to some of Gunnell's contentions. In this paper, I consider his fifth chapter, because I think that it introduces unacceptable rigidities in the study of political theory. This is not to say that aspects of other chapters are altogether free of that tendency. On the other hand, some of the scholars whom Gunnell criticizes elsewhere in his book are not free of it. Gunnell and the historical school share important traits. My overall sense is that, if the precepts advocated by either Gunnell in the fifth chapter or by the historical school (especially Quentin Skinner and J.G.A. Pocock) were followed very strictly, the study of the works of political theory would be hurt. These precepts result in imprisoning the works in the time and the practical intention of the theorist, thus blocking our access to them. In searching for ways to reopen access, we encounter other approaches to the study of political theory that offer assistance but also further obstacles.

I

Gunnell's fifth chapter may be seen as a way of "saving" the study of the great old works of political theory. The strategy is to provide a rather dramatic generalization concerning political theory, which turns out to concern the theorist's relation to his time. As he goes along, Gunnell suggests that, of course, one can give numerous and diverse reasons for

studying the old works. But it is clear that these reasons matter much less than the one large, dramatic reason Gunnell announces in his fifth chapter. In giving the numerous reasons, which are meant to avoid the latter-day impositions of "the myth of the tradition," Gunnell seems dutiful, rather disposed to be brief, and not especially desirous to add anything to the various efforts that have been made since the early 1950s to say in what consists the value of the old works.¹ (His writing catches fire when he produces his own reason.) Indeed, he indicates fairly explicitly that these earlier efforts may not be, after all, worth much.

Gunnell says that "A question inevitably arises about the status of political theory today, but it does not deserve a great deal of attention. The question has been answered in a number of ways, but most of the arguments are ultimately unsatisfying since they tend to presuppose the intellectual context of the myth of the tradition."² He here appears to retract what he had earlier allowed: namely, that good uses could be found for the old works that did not rely on subscription to "the myth of the tradition." His restlessness is a symptom, I think, of his characteristic inclination to believe that the old works are not really of much use—that is, to generations after the time of the theorist. Were they, then, of use to the generations in which they were written? I doubt that Gunnell thinks so. If the old works are to be saved, Gunnell will not save them by reference to their usefulness, whether to their own time or to later times.

The old works deserve study, in Gunnell's account, because they display intellectual heroism and—here I proceed by inference—because the study of feats of intellectual heroism is worthy in itself. Either the study needs no justification, or no justification could ever satisfy those who are not predisposed to admire intellectual heroism. Among the metaphors that Gunnell uses to capture the essence of the political theorist are "alchemist" and "sculptor."³ The political theorist must be seen as a kind of artist. He creates a "city in speech."⁴ But the artist, though a hero, is also a failure. The failure is not exactly tragic, but it is dignified: "The recalcitrant character of political matter, the extent to which it is malleable and subject to art, and its inevitable revenge that brings about the dissolution of the body politic are the principal themes in the work of every theorist."⁵ More flatly, the "city of speech" of none of the theorists whom Gunnell considers was ever realized. The sequence of old works is a sequence of unused or unapplied texts, the nature and scope of whose ambition ensured failure.

Now, Gunnell does not impute aestheticism to these artists of the political. The admirable heroism is animated by admirable passions, admirable intentions. He sees the political theorist as characteristically driven by the urge to heal. The restoration of health is the imposition of *order*: "It is in the midst of political or social disintegration that the role of the theorist

emerges, and in this situation he sees not only danger but an opportunity for a creative reconstruction of political life."⁶ The grandeur is in the productive identification of the theorist's self with his society: "His suffering comes out of the sickness of the collectivity, but it is this bond which gives rise to a regenerative force directed back toward society."⁷ The political theorist is thus Nietzsche's sick nurse or doctor: the destroyer of old illusions and the creator of new ones.⁸ It can therefore be no surprise that, for Gunnell, Plato is the "prototypal political theorist"⁹—notice, not the greatest theorist but the prototypal one.

With this conception of the political theorist, it is to be expected that writing that comes from less heroic—or less audacious or presumptuous—intentions will not be seen as political theory. Gunnell goes so far as to claim that there may be "an important sense in which the open society and political theory are incompatible."¹⁰ He locates the explanation for what he takes to be a nearly necessary fact in several sources. Some have to do with the condition of modernity: too many threats of disaster that defy comprehension, too great a tendency of the media to level the significance of events, too much "extreme social criticism and outrageous speculation, and even bizarre action," and too much writing for any one work to stand out.¹¹ But these considerations are secondary to another, which is mentioned unemotionally. Isn't the emotion nevertheless present? It is perfectly suitable that the word "community" makes its decisive appearance. Nostalgia is disguised as flat acknowledgement of a nearly necessary fact.

The open society and the simultaneous contraction, depreciation, and loss of identity of the political or public realm go hand in hand, and thus the conditions of theorizing and the object of theorizing tend to disappear together. A political community is necessarily an exclusive community with definite limits of diversity, but not all social orders are based on political community. . . . In other words, the open society and precedence of private over substantive public ends are mutually supportive ideas, and ideas that are not conducive to political theorizing.¹²

The effect of Gunnell's fifth chapter is thus twofold. First, the student of political theory is advised to see each of the old works primarily as a set of detailed prescriptions for the reconstruction of the theorist's society. If the prescriptions are intended to endure and not merely to alleviate a temporary crisis, they are nevertheless specific to a particular society and bound up in its fate. I take Gunnell to be saying that they have no relevance, and almost no resonance, for other societies and later times. Political theory loses its *theoretical* quality, by this account, even though it is *total* in its ambition. Second, only where a certain understanding of

political life is present can political theory exist at all. Only where there is a *polis* will political theory be possible. But since Gunnell admits Hobbes, after all, into the company of political theorists, an alternate formulation seems to emerge. Political theory always seeks boundedness and regularity; it aspires to regulate, in great matters and small, politically and nonpolitically; it dreams of order, whether the order is that of the closed *polis* or the absolute monarchy.

In my judgment, Gunnell's analysis threatens the study of political theory with two rigidities. By confining the theorist's interest mostly to his time and place, Gunnell breaks the connection between the theorist and all other places and all later times. The works of political theory stand simply as recommendations unused by those who were meant to use them—and nearly useless for everyone else, except as monuments to intellectual audacity. And by insisting that political theorizing is synonymous with laying down a scheme for an orderly—perhaps, ritualist and repetitious—society, the theory of democracy goes unrecognized as theory. I do not quarrel with Gunnell's effort to generalize sensibly about the old works, because I can detect no “paradigmatic” shift, from Plato to the present, in what it means to theorize about political life, despite all the shifts in the meaning of political concepts and hence in the nature of political life. The discontinuities are not absolute. My quarrel is with the content of his generalizations. I am prepared to offer my own generalizations in this essay.

Here I wish to concentrate on the first type of rigidity. This is not because the second is less worrisome, but rather because the first is linked to some of those whom Gunnell criticizes, and thus to the general issues raised in this collection. In regard to the second type, let me just note in passing that something has gone seriously wrong when the work of theorists such as Rawls and Habermas is described as follows:

Its implied contact with actual political problems and historical events seems largely illusory no matter how “political” or socially engaged its language or how evaluative and prescriptive its tone. Not only does it fail to make contact with concrete political issues in any clearly demonstrable manner, but it abstracts from, and imposes upon, its putative predecessors such as Hobbes and Locke a set of philosophical motives and concerns that arise from an academic tradition and which distorts the actual character of the enterprise in which they were engaged and the political context in which they acted.¹³

Gunnell artificially divorces “[p]hilosophical motives and concerns that arise from an academic tradition” from such motives and concerns as arose before there were professors of political theory, as if, in some strict sense, academic philosophy is a distinct and complete language in which a person

thinks and writes, just like English or German. Gunnell also fails to see that grand political theory has actually been written on behalf of the open society. If *A Theory of Justice* is not a work of political theory, I do not know what is. It shares with *The Republic*, *The Leviathan*, and *The Social Contract* the dominating theoretical wish to establish the full implications of a society's proper commitment to justice. Yet unlike these works, it sponsors openness, inclusion, tolerance, indefiniteness in the general tonality of life. On the other hand, Habermas's *Legitimation Crisis* is at the least a *contribution* to political theory. If it is more narrow in scope than most of the great old works, it is certainly a philosophical effort to reflect on political life from a moral point of view. And it is instigated by a commitment to the open society, even if the tendency of "communicative ethics" may seem to work against that commitment because of too rationalist a conception of communication. Most importantly, how could we say that Mill's *On Liberty* and *Considerations on Representative Government* are not works of political theory?

Surely Gunnell's virtual equation of political theory with lawgiving must be seen not only as a neutral heuristic method but even more as a substantive moral position. His implication is that true intellectual heroism is found only where the theorist offers drastic remedies pertaining to every aspect of political and social life. Heroism is thereby denied those whose very position is that drastic remedies are inherently suspect because they are sustained by an unforgivable presumptuousness. No theorist is wise enough to regulate the life of a whole society. Correspondingly, the humanity of a people is damaged when they are seen as objects of total regulation, as unfit to shape their lives as they go along, in the spirit of the open society. Gunnell is not really offering a new myth of the tradition so much as expressing strong distaste for the open society.

Our concern, however, is with the effect of Gunnell's conception on the way in which students of political theory should carry on their enterprise. As I have already said, the old works must leave his interpretive hands in an almost useless condition. If they are remedies for their time and place, they are perforce of little practical help for any situation significantly different. At the same time, if our admiration is meant by Gunnell to depend on the mutual congruence of the various specifications that the theorist establishes, the wish by later generations to select some specifications while disregarding others must be condemned by Gunnell's outlook. His implicit sense is that each admirable theory is a coherent whole: useable as a whole or not useable at all, and useable only by the theorist's fellows.

Gunnell employs too literal a notion of usefulness, with the result that the old works *must* turn out to be useless. It is as if he were determined from the start to show that they were useless. Another notion of usefulness

is needed, one based on a simple distinction between practical usefulness and theoretical usefulness. Simplicity could avoid simple-mindedness only if each kind of usefulness were discussed adequately. I do not pretend to such adequacy, only to give a preliminary sketch. Let me begin with practical usefulness.

Certainly, political theory is practical discourse. Gunnell is right to suggest that students of political theory often forget that the texts they confront deal with political life. But we should not see the practical usefulness of practical discourse as either a matter of all or nothing, or a matter of literal adherence, even if we feel that we can be selective in what we take from any theorist. Theorists may aspire to be complete lawgivers; though, of those who assume this role, most have little hope that their society (or any society) will literally follow their (whole systems of) prescriptions. All the theorists named by Gunnell and all the others besides have, however, another aspiration. They want to succeed as theorists.

Necessarily, then, they write for audiences that extend beyond their local contemporaries. As such, they produce practical discourse that is permanently useful in practice. But for discourse to have such usefulness, it cannot be offered as something to be taken *only* in a literal and all-or-nothing way. It may be that given theorists (whether lawgivers, or ones more modest or less radical) are not explicit about their two aspirations. They may not even manage to satisfy these aspirations equally or seamlessly. Still, they are not polemicists or propagandists. How unstrategic to produce a theory if the purpose is only or primarily immediate persuasion—even immediate persuasion to a whole set of novel specifications! There are severe limits on the degree to which political *theorists* can produce discourses useful in practice. Theorists as theorists know that theory cannot be applied literally or fully. Even when theorizing as lawgivers, theorists know that they are not lawgivers. In reading any theories, therefore, we must deliberately choose to remember what the theorists may not always seem to insist on: namely, that they are not locked into their times' emergencies and mean to speak to the generations. Their assumption is that life is always either in an emergency or disposed to fall into one.

I am not suggesting that we set the old works free from the needs of their times and places. Just because they are works of theory, their authors have already substantially set them free. And because they are free of an exclusive and intimate relation to their own times and places, they are practically useful for later generations. We can grant that they are likely to have a more direct applicability in their own times and places, but the difference in applicability for later generations is only one of degree. For contemporaries, as well as later generations, the usefulness is enabled only by the avoidance of literal adherence to the whole system of specifications

or to any of its parts. This does not mean that we treat the theorist as if he were insincere or merely playful. Indeed, contemporaries or later generations may find in the theorist a believable or truthful account of basic principles, the basic political structure, the proper tendency of governmental policy, or the most excellent spirit of a culture. But these kinds of acceptance are not equivalent to literal, total adherence to a set of specifications. Even the permanent practical usefulness of those theorists who are not lawgivers and who offer only a few specifications does not depend on literal or total adherence.

We may say, then, that political theories offer guidance concerning political practice. Each proceeds by defending a form of government. Some inquire into why government is necessary; they try to demonstrate that the very reason government is necessary dictates that government should take one form rather than any other. The elaborated defense is wide-ranging. Some theories range as far as heaven and hell and the entire extent of cultural life; others are more restricted but never narrow, at least in their implications. The real riches are found in the arguments that support the preference. The guidance is here because the analysis is at its most intense. By avoiding a literal-minded, all-or-nothing choice, later generations (if you will, students of political theory and others who have taken the trouble to read the old works) can learn to improve political practice from any great or good theorist. They do not have to agree in order to benefit. The whole matter of agreement and disagreement tends to become irrelevant. (Even a constitutional democrat may learn something about the pitfalls of constitutional democracy from its enemies *avant la lettre*: say, Plato in *The Republic* or Hobbes in all his books.) Agreement or disagreement is, of course, not completely irrelevant: every political theory has a pronounced tendency which should not be obscured by an eager eclecticism. Still, the worse vice is a rigid partisanship.

My point is that we may be guided by a political theory *loosely*. We should take theoretical systems part by part, point by point, and not literally. Even though the theorist must strain to achieve wholeness of vision, and even though this effort may inspire richer parts than a more limited approach, we can rarely absorb a text whole. At one time, a particular practical argument in a theory may seem especially pertinent, may suddenly feel right or "hit home." At another time, another argument in the same theory will have this effect. Mood, chance, and need affect receptivity and hence interpretation. Furthermore, an argument dealing with one aspect of government or of other institutions in the larger society may seem truly appropriate when transferred to some other aspect, or indeed to some other institution altogether. Relevance may be felt more in analogous situations than in similar or identical ones. Then, too, a particular argument

on behalf of a practice may seem an exaggeration of, or an approximation to, a correct position: not to be accepted or rejected, except in a qualified manner. Or a particular argument may seem too faint or attenuated, and will be thought to need heightening.

More concretely, a specific institutional or procedural recommendation may be detached from its accompaniments and adopted by itself. The manner of adoption also may be "loose." The institution or procedure may be altered when adopted; indeed, it is necessarily altered just by being incorporated in a structure different from the one proposed by the theorist. Again, when a theoretical system is deemed valuable as a whole—say, for the sake of criticizing another system, real or proposed—it need not be taken literally. It can be taken as a stimulating thought-experiment rather than as a blueprint or a model. No theory is practically useful, except on these terms. Yet Gunnell leads us to forsake the very possibility that a theory may be useful because he imputes to the theorist an overwhelming desire to be useful to the theorist's society only.

This sort of loose practical usefulness of a theory is enhanced by the availability of other theories. The copresence of numerous theories gives value to each precisely by denying it the intolerable responsibility of being the only source of guidance. Numerous perspectives on political practice may be brought into the juxtaposition of "the museum without walls."¹⁴ The result is that each is affected by our knowledge of all the rest: enriched but circumscribed. Every trouble must be taken to avoid an excessive anachronism. But we would cease to be students of political theory if we let fear of anachronism pervade our study. I believe that we would not study our subject right if we did not first succumb to some anachronism before recovering ourselves. Of course, Athens is not America, the fifth century B.C. is not the twentieth century A.D., the *polis* is not the nation-state, direct democracy is not representative democracy, Greek is not English, the ancient mental universe is not the modern one, and so on. The point of insisting that practical guidance can be loose, and is genuine only when loose, is to allow all the differences between the social context of a theory and of later generations to register their importance.

Yet the differences are not to be allowed the last word. When the guidance of *imagination*—of change, reform, or possibility—is at stake, its provider is itself to be understood as an imagination. Imagination instructing imagination is a process which defies insistence that the urgencies of one time and place are all-absorbing. It is also the case that the ways in which one may choose to be instructed are the same loose, but not unfaithful, ways in which one is unknowingly or unconsciously instructed. The influence of a text over one's sense of practical possibility and desirability—

in structure, institution, procedure, and policy—need not be easy to trace or even recognize.

Gunnell's quite sensitive discussion of Gadamer's complex and adventurous conception of interpreting a text does not, I believe, leave a sufficient residue in the fifth chapter.

II

If my proposal on the practical usefulness of the old works must set me at odds with Gunnell, it even more clearly must set me at odds with the precepts of J.G.A. Pocock and Quentin Skinner. In the spirit of this essay, let me emphasize that I learn from both of them, because their best works (say, *The Machiavellian Moment* and *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*) break free from their precepts. One learns much, of course, even from their programmatic writing, despite strenuous disagreement. But their precepts must have a devastating effect on the project of accepting guidance about political practice from the old works. Skinner has since mitigated some of the unrelenting historizing of his manifesto of 1969. But neither he nor Pocock ever go so far as to say, in their programmatic writing, that the old works have any sort of usefulness for later generations. They do not allow what a writer usually associated with them—John Dunn—allows: namely, that political theory is theory, is philosophy.¹⁵ Not to allow this is to close the subject of political theory to anyone in the field of political science and, even worse, to anyone seeking understanding about political practice. The fact is that, if Gunnell locks a work in its time, he at least conveys a sense of the largeness of the theorist's remedial effort. There is heroism in the theorist's ambition of total relevance. The programmatic work of Skinner and Pocock, however, not only locks theorists in their own times but also strips them of heroism. This results from the manner, common to both, of describing the nature of a work of political theory.

Pocock's description of a text in political theory as an "event" is an indication of the distinctive view that he and Skinner are trying to defend.¹⁶ Notwithstanding all the allowances that Pocock makes for reading theory as theory and for the view that an author conveys more meaning than he intended or knew he was conveying,¹⁷ his programmatic emphasis is on the text as an event: that is, the text as a gesture made at a "moment" in history.¹⁸ The gesture is, to be sure, practical. The text is an author's political involvement. Pocock says that "The historian . . . would say that . . . it remains possible to reconstruct the author's intention from a study of text and context, and that the history of how 'what the author meant'

gave place to 'what the text meant to its readers' cannot be adequately written unless provided with a starting point."¹⁹ This is not merely to insist that a given text may contain obscurities that only knowledge of the theorist's time and place—knowledge of what is outside the text—can clarify. Nor is it to say merely that historical research into the process of composition of a text may also clear up obscurities. The radical notion is that, to begin with, a theoretical text just is a practical gesture and that if later generations find it useful, they are not so much reading it as misconstruing it in some adventitious or even exploitative way.

Pocock repels the thought that theorists, as theorists, are always creatures of more than local intentions, that they always intend their work for later generations as well as their own, that their books are intended to have unpredictable careers of use. The theoretical text is never only a gesture. I believe, in fact, that it is never a gesture at all—precisely because it is a theoretical text. That Locke published *Two Treatises of Government* after the Glorious Revolution to assist the task of vindication says nothing about what went into its writing. Indeed, it is a poor companion to the rhetoric of the revolutionaries. The word "intention"—if used to name a specific, limited purpose—is never at home in discourse about the contents of a theoretical text.

Skinner's conception is even more rigid. If the view of text as event inhibits a later generation from seeking practical guidance in the text, even more does the view that a text of political theory is a speech act. (Other "relatively heteronomous" sorts of texts can be speech acts, too.²⁰) Skinner holds that "the relevance of speech-act theory lies in . . . treating the text as a form of social action, and seeking to understand it by way of recovering what the writer saw himself as doing in writing it."²¹ Skinner itemizes the kinds of speech acts in brief descriptions. For example, an author may have been engaged in affirming ideas; reminding his audience of the worth of endangered ideas; submitting ideas to debate by challenging, questioning, and criticizing; or rejecting ideas by invective, ridicule, or parody. He writes that the whole range is "polemical."²² Now, Skinner allows that an author may have complex intentions;²³ but the characteristic tendency of his programmatic writing is to confine each of the main old works within one particular kind of speech act and to imply that this categorization says something crucial about the text. It is, however, barely the first thing to say. To say that Hobbes challenged contemporary ideas about authority is to say something correct but embarrassingly trivial.

Like Pocock, Skinner indicates that there may be more or less in a text than the author meant: the author may have failed to say all that he meant; or he may have achieved, beyond his intentions, a meaning more discernible to "an alert and dispassionate observer" than to himself.²⁴ But

this still serves the view that an author of political theory has a basic intention—a complex but single intention of an immediately practical sort. Skinner insists that the main focus for the student of political theory is “how we think a given writer intended us to take his text.” All else is “parasitic on the basic task.”²⁵

We should notice that other claims accompany this essentially reductive conception of the nature of a work in political theory. On the one hand, Skinner not only maintains that a theoretical text is a specific speech act, he also maintains that a “range of speech acts [exists that] can standardly be performed by a given writer when he makes sense of a given set of concepts or terms.”²⁶ In his eagerness to establish the local and time-bound quality of a text, Skinner goes so far as to suggest that the student of political theory must “grasp the nature and range of things that could recognizably have been done by using that particular concept, in the treatment of that particular theme, at that particular time.”²⁷ A writer is limited by the contemporary “stock of concepts” and other conventions then obtaining.²⁸

Skinner is here coming very close to implying that the student can always determine, in principle, what was possible for a writer to have said. Skinner’s only evidence, of course, is what we know was said in the writer’s time and place. His argument is therefore suspect. By no means could he extrapolate from the existing conventions to every possible utterance or even to their possible range. Producing a theory is not like following a recipe. In any event, theory is precisely that which says creatively what has not yet been said or what was not considered by others possible to say. Once said, it may seem perfect or inevitable. But it has created its own audience. If it had not come into existence, we would not know what we were missing. Seemingly similar great or good texts written in the same time and place cannot be substituted for each other, or used to fabricate some new great or good text that could or should have been written, whatever the ingenuities of computer-aided methods of composition. Innovation in thought is not what Skinner says it is: namely, “legitimizing untoward social actions,”²⁹ finding those reasons for new behavior that seem to derive from the traditional repertory of moral argument. The analogy of text to act and the idea of act as not merely enabled but wholly constituted by a network of conventions join to efface the entire distinctiveness of a theoretical or philosophical work and to call into question the ascription of greatness or merit to any text.

On the other hand, Skinner says that, in addition to what the author intended, the other main kind of meaning a text may have, is “the meaning for me.” “What does this work mean to me?”³⁰ is a legitimate question. This formulation is actually hostile to the effort to use a text for practical

(and theoretical) guidance. Skinner's phrase "for me" reduces the impact of a theoretical work to a matter of individual subjectivity. This phrase grants permission to have a good time with a book, if one wants, but not to expect that the results of a reading done apart from speech-act philosophy can mean much to others or bear any relation to the intention of the theorist. The intention of theorists to be theorists drops from consideration. They become captive of a delimited practical intention, just as later readers become captive of their own mere subjectivity. Skinner's phrase disallows that a purposive reader of a text may appeal to the assent of other readers and that theorists, as theorists, intend that later generations, in continuing examination of their works will enhance them by the exchange and interplay of various readings.

Common, then, to Gunnell's fifth chapter and the programmatic writing of Pocock and Skinner is the nearly exclusive confinement of political theory to local and temporary practical intentions. They share the principal tendency to minimize the theoretical quality of political theory. In the first instance, their respective approaches, if adopted rigorously, would prevent later generations from trying to gain loose practical guidance from political theory. They would discourage one's willingness to undergo some direct or less easily specifiable influence on one's thought about political practice: thought about structure, process, procedure, policy, and general spirit. That Skinner writes of theory as ideology and as the "legitimation of untoward social actions," and that he illustrates this latter actively by successful attempts to manipulate old words to take on desired new meanings also indicate a shriveling attitude to theory.³¹ Such an attitude may readily attach itself to an insistence on the virtual exhaustion of political theory by practical intentions at once local and temporary.

III

Nonetheless, the major issue is not defense of the old works as sources of loose practical guidance. Rather, it is their defense as sources of theoretical guidance: as writing that is theoretically useful, helping the generations to think theoretically about political life. The wish for practical guidance, though not negligible, is minor. I do not say that theory is an autonomous realm, unaffected by history and playing no role in it. Yet I think that the great gain from immersion in the old works is found in the improvement of political understanding: the power to make sense of political life in one's time or in earlier periods. One need have no direct practical purpose to benefit from the texts.

To emphasize understanding is simply to recall the root meaning of theory: the theoretical life was originally one of watching, looking intently, seeing knowledgeably, being disposed to treat political life as a spectacle. "As for living, our servants will do that for us." Usually accompanying this disposition to observe is the sense that reality is not what it appears to be, that seemingly unconnected things are connected, that events may give the perceptive witness an early and obscure signal of their emergence, and that there may be hidden causes at work in the production of dramatic events. Yet another sense may be present: that those who act may not be able to give an account of themselves, or are too busy to think about what they are doing, or do not know the forces that drive them, or are unaware of the discrepancy between the true meaning of what they are saying and doing and what they believe or allege they are saying and doing. (Relentless attention to this discrepancy is the salient characteristic of both Marxist and Freudian hermeneutics.) At the furthest reaches, this latter sense may posit the existence of a purpose or a process to which political actors unknowingly contribute their energy and passion, or a pattern to the completion or perfection of which they unknowingly supply an element. Last, there is the sense that almost every particular political phenomenon must appear strange or remarkable when its description is faithfully given, when questions are pressed about it, or when its full significance is brought out by patient exploration and a readiness to subject it to the full demands of either the moral point of view or the canons of good sense. Political phenomena do not need dramatizing for their drama to disclose itself; they only need a theoretically prepared gaze.

The search for theoretical guidance from the old works is the search for ways to appease, confirm, or challenge these various senses; and it is impelled by the conviction that both political life in general and any significant particular are immensely difficult to understand and intensely worthy of understanding. The moral sense and the esthetic sense combine indissociably in sustaining that conviction.

In other words, a thoughtful person finds that every step along the way of everyday life (and political life, as well) opens out on an abyss of philosophical perplexity. Not only do the great questions of cosmology and mortality excite questioning, but so must the seemingly simplest transactions of life. Conceptual and substantive uncertainty continually present themselves and necessitate the formal effort of theory or philosophy. Political life is full of this kind of uncertainty to those who choose to think seriously about it. The study of the law and the study of fiction are two great preparations for thinking about the philosophical perplexity of everyday life, just as political theory is a great preparation for thinking about such perplexity in political life. Theory does not force perplexity on life but

only activates it. Though necessarily alienated, theory is not alien. Human activities, political or nonpolitical, are guided by conventions: that is, by answers that quiet questions that can be answered in other ways, by other conventions. Conventions are thus "always already" enacted theory. The political theorist challenges tacit political theory with conscious theoretical reflection, unmasking conventions by demonstrating that they are only conventions. In turn, political theories unmask each other by deliberately raising questions anew.

I would say that the core of theoretical usefulness is the capacity of the old works to contribute to a cultivated understanding of political life. They provide numerous perspectives from which to look at political life, numerous pairs of eyes through which to see its most important traits or events. (Or are most theorists one-eyed, as Mill suggested Bentham was?) Political theorists should be read as great or good readers of political life.

The analogy between reading a text and observing ("reading") social life inspires much modern intellectual life. Certainly not all the great or good political theorists approach social life as if it were a text in need of reading, but a good number of them do. The common element is that, in both cases, there is more than appears at a glance; more than meets the eye, which must be trained to see. To see is to interpret. Yet the operations in reading a text are not the same as those in reading social life, just vaguely similar. (Social life is harder to read than texts because texts are meant to be read. We expect to have to study and interpret them. In doing so, we construct sentences about constructed sentences. But social life is not ordinarily carried on for the sake of being understood by those who study it. Regardless of how great the extent to which language is woven into various activities, reading them is different from reading a text.)

Among the operations involved in reading social life are: *noticing* a particular event, sequence, or condition when others seem not to be paying attention; *inferring* the meaning of a particular where doubt, secrecy, or obscurity exists; *distilling* the meaning of a particular by means of restatement and redescription in order to establish or sharpen the point of it; *translating* the meaning of a particular into terms not intrinsically its own or not commonly used about it, in order to bring out its unexpected moral or existential resemblance to another particular; and *connecting* particulars into a pattern or system in order to impute causal links or systemic integration. The study of the analogy between the two kinds of reading has recently been enriched by complex theories of relations between texts (or other mental productions, including dreams) and conditions outside themselves, whether in society or the individual. Also valuable are theories that propose we read texts as if they were mental phenomena, especially akin to dreams,

and theories that take the analogy so seriously as to transform social life into textuality or the text into a social symptom or manifestation.

Political theorists' readings, their interpretations of the text that is political and cultural reality, are of course not neatly separated from their moral intentions, indeed moral passions. Their passions enable their readings. Correspondingly, their readings are expressed in sentences that resist separation according to the categories of "descriptive" and "evaluative." The reading of reality is morally animated throughout, and the moral animation is inextricably joined to the fascination with reality and the attempt to seize its meaning. I acknowledge that my own distinction between the practical and the theoretical usefulness of a text is artificial; it is helpful, if at all, only barely and provisionally.

Skinner may not like the word "wisdom." Yet the reason for disliking it is not the anthropological view that denies sufficient similarity to disparate times and places for general understanding to be possible but rather the feeling that the word is pretentious. It is best not to lay claim to wisdom, or even attribute it to another. Let us just say that enough of a common fate ties humanity together so that theory or philosophy (and poetry) can break through almost any barrier of otherness, or at least make otherness partly intelligible.

I have already said that, even where a theorist is approached for direct practical guidance, the real riches are found in the arguments which support the form, process, procedure, policy, or general cultural spirit meant to be promoted. This is to say that, when theorists (of the sort who are read generation after generation) promote a cause, they can be counted on to say more than they need and, indeed, to say too much. Their arguments are richer than the occasion calls for, and may be so rich as to impede any direct polemical or apologetic intention. Their language and meaning are ordinarily too hard to teach any but those who teach others. There are exceptions, of course. Tom Paine, for one, managed the nearly impossible feat of producing a genuine political theory read by an unlearned audience. Yet more typically, political theory, like all other kinds of philosophy, requires a studious attention which only a few will ever give.

The further fact is that, in addition to the riches attached to defense of practical proposals, there are the riches which the theorist scatters along the way: riches presented in the course of constructing the whole political theory. The range of considerations introduced in the old works is indefinitely large; and as long as political theory goes on, the range must remain unpredictable. I do not mean to say that political theory is marked by gratuitousness or that a Montaigne-like genius has presided over the production of the old works. No, practical intention has usually disciplined rumination. The fact remains, however, that the discipline of practical

intention is quite light whenever theorists, as theorists, undertake their enterprise. Characteristically, they have sought to cultivate the political understanding of readers. Naturally, they have not been neutral or academically distant from political life, even when avoiding direct participation in it. But they have had observation in mind and have, as theorists, imposed on their writing certain antipartisan, antipractical restraints. If they had not, later generations would not read them, if they had not, they would not be theorists.

If the old works can best be taken as offering loose practical guidance, nonliteral and selective, their theoretical usefulness is similar. The general interpretive point is that a work in political theory should not be handled as if it were a unity, a fragile object. Just as it is not best considered as a tight scheme for total reform or as a univocal speech act, so it is best not likened to a lyric poem—a well-wrought utterance of absolute pointedness, economy, and shapeliness. What we know about the process of composition of many of especially the great works of political theory discourages the notion that they are perfect artifacts. Many were written over long and interrupted periods of time, were left unfinished, were put together posthumously, or show evidence of patchwork and disconnectedness. But even where the process of composition was faultless, no one is obliged to learn from them on terms of (to use the phrase again) all or nothing. Not only are political theories not lyric poems; we do well not to liken them to novels, except those which Henry James called, but without affection, “such large loose baggy monsters.”³² (He had, alas, Tolstoy in mind, among others, but that only helps the point along.) Claiming that the old works are incoherent would be foolish. My claim, instead, is that the unity of almost every one of them is given more by the sensibility or temperament of the theorist than by the rigor of system. It is as if the very nature of political theory were uncongenial to the rigor of system and favored a more open texture. The texts are and must be expected to be open: not unified, yet not incoherent.

The student's political understanding is cultivated by close acquaintance with texts approached as if they were a series of moments whose internal relations matter most at the initial stages of one's acquaintance. A text must be provisionally established in the mind as a unity, so that it not weary the reader by inducing impatience, creating anxiety concerning the way the parts fit or what the overall tendency of argument is. After a while, the effort to pull and twist a text into a perfect shapeliness usually will be seen as hopeless and not worthwhile. Sections and passages—moments—will vindicate themselves. A negative capability may take hold in the reader and let the text open up. It is from oneself—from one's mechanical passion to have a discourse proceed in a smooth and orderly

way to arrive at one easily assignable meaning—that one must liberate the text so that it may be used; it cannot be used otherwise. Further, all the strain that comes from deciding whether one can agree or must disagree with the theorist's basic tendency may fade—and along with it, worry over perfect consistency or adequate inclusiveness. The strain and the worry can never disappear completely. Nor should they: that would make it too easy on the theorist, as well as on the reader. Nevertheless, to hold the text, one's grasp must be loose.

The loose ways of accepting practical guidance can be extended to reception of all the parts of the text. Theoretical guidance can take the form of a belief in the exact or literal truth of a section or passage. Better, however, is a disposition to regard the words as attenuations and approximations, as hints and clues, as intimations to be pursued, as valid relationally, or as transferable from one aspect of life to another: in sum, as *loci* of suggestiveness; as incitements to imitation, revision, and surpassing. The words may even be thought false before something happens to awaken the sense of their relevance or rightness. And often, a sense of the validity of a passage is preceded by a "willing suspension of disbelief," in Coleridge's phrase, rather than a predisposition in the theorist's favor.³³

At the extreme, this strategy of reading dissolves each text into sections and passages, into a montage or assemblage or even collage. The parts of a text do not all have the same quality of reality. They do not all come, so to speak, from the same place or exist in the same time and on the same plane. These metaphors express the idea that theoretical texts are profitably regarded as shifting, unstable, mixed, hybrid, impure, uneven, or unpredictable. The strategy also juxtaposes—at risk of anachronism—all the texts that one can plausibly juxtapose. Not only do parts of a particular text come unbidden to the mind in the right mood or under the right need or pressure, but they come associated with parts of other texts to qualify and enhance them. Much greater than the risk of anachronism is that of flattening a writer's distinctive style of mind, converting his thought into bleached propositions to coexist unproblematically with bleached propositions from other theorists. The reader must go far in dissolving the text; but there is such a thing as being so zealous in pressing the old works into service as to make of them one large system of unrhetorized and unpoetized statements, all emitted by one mind in the same language.

The valuable moments are moments of the possibility of truth. In regard to any text, the truth is not the whole but the part. Only in regard to all texts is the truth the whole. But that truth is not absolute truth. Nor is it a completable truth, because all texts are always not yet written. The texts require each other's presence: each is defined and made more abundant partly by its later influence and partly by later texts, even those

not influenced. Later authors help to write the books of earlier ones. Texts make each other more readable and hence more useful. Every great or good text has some truth to contribute; none, therefore, is dispensable. In fact, there are not enough great or good political theories. Their number is small compared with the number of great or good poems and novels in even only one of the principal languages, even though the quantity of writing devoted to particular questions is enormous.

The valuable moments include general formulations about political life and about human nature or the human condition from a political perspective. They also include particular moral judgments, moral discoveries, elaborated concepts, conceptual inventions, and endlessly suggestive tropes and parables that reawaken the original truth long since degenerated into platitudes. All these moments strengthen the student's ability to reflect on political life in general and on significant particulars. Not with easy cumulation, but rather with dramatic and perhaps dialectical turbulence, the assorted moments do their useful theoretical work for the student.

IV

It may be asked whether moments are enough, whether (perhaps unadditive) bits and pieces that suggest the truth are enough to expect. Do not some of the old works give a sustained presentation of *the* truth, of *knowledge* of "both the nature of political things and the right, or the good, political order?"³⁴ These words of Leo Strauss seem to imply that such knowledge derives from an unimpeachable source. To be sure, he distinguishes political philosophy from "political theology," which rests on divine revelation. "Political philosophy is limited to what is accessible to the unassisted human mind."³⁵ Yet I think that Strauss at least entertains the possibility that the unassisted human mind can attain a glimpse of an authentication for its political life. The authentication sought is from a nonhuman or transcendent source. He says that "Philosophy is essentially not possession of the truth, but quest for the truth"³⁶ and that, "In spite of its highness or nobility, it could appear as Sisyphean or ugly, when one contrasts its achievement with its goal."³⁷ Yet the whole movement of his thought seems to go in the direction of praising Plato and Aristotle at the expense of modern enlightenment. This means, in his case, that he not only endorses the quest for truth but is inclined to hold that the quest is basically as they conceive it. The quest for truth is the quest for authentication, for foundations of political right. The foundations must come from outside humanity, which cannot provide its own foundations. Humanity is not its own measure, or it is bad for it to think so.

A matter as grave as the quest for foundations and its philosophical propriety cannot be treated here, even if I presumed that I could treat it. I only wish to indicate my belief that it is a mistake to think that morality needs authentication, needs foundations. I also suspect that the quest for foundations for a whole "order" is futile. To approach the study of political theory with the intent of discovering foundations—or at least, the directions in which to seek them—is to approach it in the wrong spirit.

Foundations for morality are not needed. No reasons of a nonhuman sort have to be given to justify human beings in treating each other decently and with regard for basic rights and well-being. Nonhuman authentication would rest on either fear of punishment in the afterlife, or obedience to the nonhuman for the sake of obedience, or a belief that being moral is not inextricably joined to such constitutive human capacities as love, friendship, respect, sympathy, and recognition. It would require derivation from a plan or purpose superior and not fully disclosed or disclosable to human beings. To say, however, that reasons are needed to justify the constraints of morality is to make it (or thinking about it) a hostage to expediency. Moral perplexity should not stem from trying to answer the question: why be moral? Nor should it concern the nature of the basic principle or idea of morality. Some version or other of the Golden Rule is the basic principle. What the principle requires is not defense but elaboration. Morality needs no foundations; it is the foundation. No foundational inquiry could possibly clarify moral perplexity, the true occasions of which arise when secondary principles are ambiguous, unclear, or in conflict, when concepts seem unequipped to deal with new experience, when the facts of the case are in dispute, and so on. Political theories offer innumerable examples of wrestling with it. To link thinking about morality with foundations is not only to misdirect attention but also to associate morality unnecessarily with the whole "onto-theological" enterprise of Western metaphysics that Nietzsche, Heidegger, and later figures have tried to dismantle or destroy, with varying degrees of respect for their theoretical victim.

To be sure, most of the great and good political theorists have reasoned morally with reference to foundations—whether God's will, Nature's purpose, Reason's plan, or something else. In reading them, we should abandon the effort to take them on their own terms, on this as on other matters. Their theoretical usefulness does not depend on—and can be severed from—their own foundational pretenses. To free the texts for use is, among other things, to free them from their own mystique of foundations. Of course, we must free ourselves first, if we are to free them. The proper spirit is respect for those who try to answer unanswerable questions; but in regard to morality, the unanswerable transcendental questions are unnecessary.

With regard to foundations for a whole "order," for a way of life, I am able to say only that the quest seems to me haunted by the image of the lawgiver, who specifies a whole set of prescriptions under divine inspiration for a small society in which whatever is not a duty is a sin. The line between political theory and political theology, which Strauss tried to draw, threatens to vanish. There is a superstitious cast to the quest. He said that "The character of classical political philosophy appears with the greatest clarity from Plato's *Laws*, which is his political work *par excellence*."³⁸ (Gunnell's conception of the political theorist as lawgiver is close to Strauss's, except that Gunnell does not dwell on the desire of the lawgiver to authenticate his prescriptions.) The Straussian implication is that the task of political theory is to sponsor a determinate way of life and so show that it is the one and only right one. To this, I respond that questions about moral failures and imperfections, changes and reforms, applications and judgments are always open to dispute. Once basic morality is satisfied in the political and general life of a society, there is no way of judging it qualitatively better or worse than other societies, when all are on roughly the same level of development of human powers. Every real society, as well as every society projected in works of political (and other) theory, is necessarily selective in the strengths, virtues, talents, energies, and aspirations which it encourages or discourages or ignores, enlists or suppresses or omits. There are different tonalities, manners, and codes. Excellence is sacrificed to excellence. Uncertainties, ambiguities, and contradictions abound in this kind of cultural economy.

But no real or theorized way of life is open to literally everything. Not even the open society is—if only because of distaste, timidity, or ignorance. And even a particular open society will have its special coloration. The point is that no possible method exists for assessing the comparative claims of systems when they all satisfy basic morality and are on the same cultural level. At least, no secular method exists. Is the French way of life the right one, and all others wrong? Is the French way qualitatively better than the English way? Indeed, is there a French or an English way? How could there be a "political knowledge" to answer such questions? We are in the realm of defensible preference. Political theory should not be forced into the service of disguising preference as absolute knowledge. To free the texts is, among other things, to free them of responsibility for what is either unnecessary or impossible.

V

So far, then, I have tried to say that substantive usefulness of the works of political theory depends on the refusal to see them as bound to

their times and places or to the purpose of supplying absolute political knowledge. Theorists, as theorists, free themselves from restriction to their own times and places. But we must free them from the purpose of supplying absolute political knowledge by disregarding that purpose when it is present. (Theorists, as theorists, do not necessarily seek absolute political knowledge. Only some have sought it, or claimed to.)

My premise is that no text is useable or believable as a whole or on its own terms, even when we acknowledge that it was intended to be free of an exclusive practical intention for its own time and place and when we free it of our yearning for unnecessary or impossible authentication. Ancillary to that premise is the view that no text in political theory should be read as a unity, even where the composition appears seamless. The writer's sensibility or temperament may be taken as constant, but the details of the text exceed the requirements of any intention except being a theorist: one who aspires to give substantive instruction to the generations in numerous ways. The great and good works contain a surplus richness that increases with its use over time. The generations keep enlarging the meaning of the works by accepting their guidance loosely. This enlargement is not arbitrary, subjective, or contrary to the intention of theorists as theorists, who want their works to outlast them and know that works remain alive only if able to radiate an indefinite suggestiveness.

There is, however, another main kind of usefulness that is only indirectly substantive, that only indirectly consists in practical guidance or theoretical guidance, only indirectly contributes to the improvement of either political practice or the understanding of political life. This other usefulness depends on the previous premise and ancillary but requires yet another premise: that theorists, as theorists, know that success in trying to provide even loose practical and theoretical guidance can come only on certain terms. Those who expect a theory to be useable as a whole or who insist on reading a text as a unity will find the terms so circumscribed that success may appear as failure. The other usefulness is thus methodological: political theories demonstrate the inevitable multiplicity of theorizing. By this demonstration, they also provide definite (even if indirect) practical and theoretical guidance: all intensify the sense that political life is ultimately mysterious and that, therefore, efforts to improve political practice and understanding must always encounter severe limits. The succession of political theories energizes both efforts; yet when read as I have proposed, they will give an energy that, oddly enough, entails a mature absence of ungoverned expectations. They restrain the energy which they increase.

The key consideration is that, *when examined carefully*, almost every one of the old works discloses surprising elements, many of which are concessions to views disliked or contended against by the theorist. These

elements give a theory its multiplicity. I emphasize careful examination because, though I sympathize with Strauss's pleas for subtlety, for reading between the lines, his purpose is not what needs greater attention.³⁹ Actually, I am not even clear about his purpose. The famous essay on "Persecution and the Art of Writing" seems to drift from one theme to another: from the idea that many philosophers and political theorists disguised their meaning out of fear that they would be persecuted for heretical candor, to the idea that they disguised their meaning out of fear that their candor could erode certainties supposedly required for social order. At one point, to be sure, Strauss connected the two ideas. "Exoteric literature presupposes that there are basic truths which would not be pronounced in public by any decent man, because they would do harm to many people who, having been hurt, would naturally be inclined to hurt in turn him who pronounces the unpleasant truths."⁴⁰ The connection seems forced; but what matters is that such suspicious subtlety, which doubtless has a place, is not the same thing as taking care to notice when theorists make concessions and thus, not unintentionally, arm their adversaries.

All who are honest as theorists know better than their theories, at least on some points. As stated earlier, the theorist, as theorist, knows and says more than the theory needs. This accounts for the surplus richness of every theory. But this is distinct from the passion for honesty—I do not know what else to call it—that makes the theorist cross his own intentions. As an inestimably valuable result, students of political theory can gradually develop a sense that honesty must always impede the working out of a theory. Such honesty is distinguished from a wish to disarm criticism by ingratiating gestures of seeming generosity of self-doubt. This wish is common and sometimes surfaces in even the greatest writing, political theory or otherwise. Instead, the honesty of theorists as theorists is the courage to acknowledge theoretical necessity, the inevitable limits on any theory's power. Genuine theorists are often tempted or haunted by what they struggle against, as if contending positions were necessary parts of a larger system, or symbiotically connected, or inwardly kindred.

Explicit concessions—though seldom announced as such—can be seen better in contrast to other strengths and deficiencies likely to be present in a work of theory. Perhaps the relevant strength closest in spirit to making concessions is the ability to formulate adversarial arguments by skillful acts of impersonation. Plato is celebrated for this gift, which resembles that of great novelists or dramatists. In modern times, Mill demonstrates a remarkable readiness to state positions that threaten his own. At times he was more articulate in their behalf than those who believed them, or in behalf of his own positions. Of course, the appearance of adversarial arguments in a text devoted to refuting or qualifying them must diminish

their force somewhat. Mill was the first to say that there was no real substitute for knowing an argument in a believer's own words.

Among the relevant deficiencies are confusion, inconsistency, and contradiction. Thus the theorist seems lost, now and then, or to forget what is said in other parts of the text, or be unable to control the flow of argument. Any writer is prey to such weaknesses. But in great or good writers, these are small blemishes. Imperfect or posthumously assembled text may account for some. Or theorists startled by the novelty of their particular discoveries may fail to state them lucidly, integrate them fully, or draw out their implications adequately. Pointing out such deficiencies is, of course, a fair part of teaching the old works. This is necessary and not to be despised, even though minor. Yet alone, it does not lead to the disclosure of deliberate concessions.

VI

More importantly, we must get beyond obsession with consistency in order to consider those deficiencies that are not quite deficiencies and that partly resemble deliberate concessions. These quasi-deficiencies also partly resemble the real deficiencies of confusion, inconsistency, and contradiction. Thinking about them is greatly helped by recent developments in literary theory which concentrate discussion of the fundamental: what is writing, especially theoretical writing? I do not presume to elaborate their complex concepts, let alone to explain their pertinence to studying the old works of political theory. I merely borrow and adapt a few such notions, especially from Jacques Derrida and Paul de Man.⁴¹ I read them as theorists of theory—all kinds of theory, including political theory.

Even the slightest acquaintance with these two scholars reveals that several philosophical projects motivate their work. Despite their differences, both aim to demonstrate that even great writers are subject to imperatives that inhere in language. Both are led to dispute many kinds of claims to autonomy made by or in behalf of even great writers. They embed this argument in a general critique of the related claims that an individual subject can have a spontaneous and linguistically unmediated self-possession or self-presence. They emphasize that human nature is ineffaceably artificial, dependent not only on words but on impersonal systems of articulation. Furthermore, all human discourse posits the objects which we habitually think it only describes. They portray humanity as merely talking to itself and creating its own infinity of meaning without hope of response or confirmation from any voice not already made possible by and included within human discourse. And they explore the ways in which language

could be said to use us, even as we pride ourselves on using it. Notice, also, that their view of the writer's dependence is distinct from the structuralist view—to which Skinner shows affinities—that a writer is invariably bound (but also enabled) not by language as such but by the conceptual matrix of a given time, place, and intellectual discourse.

There are further socio-political implications, especially in Derrida's thought. My point, however, is that these writers, too, need not be taken in an all-or-nothing way—provided, of course, that they have first been understood. Derrida and de Man offer powerful stimulation to thinking about texts, though one may flee their more radical or “nihilist” projects. Instead of joining their campaign against the notion of the self-sufficient writer (and the self-possessed subject), we can mitigate their indictment, yet still use their work. We would forcibly detach some of their notions from their philosophical intentions and could perhaps go so far as to receive loose guidance from them for our intentions. What Derrida and de Man regard as deficiencies (whether inevitable or not), we could sometimes regard as quasi-deficiencies. (A careful reading shows that they sometimes mitigate their own indictment, perplexing their own theses.) We could also say that what we describe as deliberate concessions, they do not consider at all, so intent are they to campaign against the notion of the self-sufficient writer. To be able to say both these things is to be in a position to suggest the methodological kind of usefulness found in the old works.

Derrida and de Man break up every text they read. They labor to show that no writer could possibly succeed in creating an adequate theoretical understanding of one or another great question about the human condition. Neither may want this point made so flatly. But both typically do delineate theoretical failure. I do not understand, except dimly, why they believe that the imperatives of language guarantee failure. Let us leave that to one side—even though it is their most important matter. Notice, instead, that neither mocks the theoretical effort; they do not diminish the writers they study, even though they insist on the inevitability of failure.

I put their suggestion in the most simple, coarse way: theoretical writers almost always defeat their most serious intentions. On the issues that concern them most deeply, they almost always say what they do not wish to say or wish they had to say. They somehow get the better of themselves.⁴² They are outwitted by their own arguments. (Deconstruction is at an opposite extreme from Skinner's version of the theory of text as speech act.)

Apparently, only a reader—another mind than even the greatest writer's—can see these processes clearly present in a given theoretical text. Some readers can therefore understand those texts better than their authors could, just as an analyst is supposed to understand you and your dreams

better than you can. (De Man allows that a writer such as Rousseau may necessarily mislead his most devoted readers, just because he is least blind to his own deficiencies as a theorist.⁴³) De Man goes further than Derrida in sometimes suggesting that theorists may know that they are failing and must take measures to cover up their failure.⁴⁴ Such writers leave some explicit indication—in the text or elsewhere—that they know they are failing. The reader is then to highlight this indication and undo the cover-up. (Even where this duplicity is alleged, de Man still does not diminish the writers or their texts.) Yet the characteristic view is that writers do not know that they are failing or that they must fail.

Derrida and de Man explore a number of recurrent manifestations of failure. Typical is the existence of dead ends (*aporia*) in a text, where theorists show themselves, knowingly or not, unable to work out of problems which they had to face or maybe made for themselves. Another is blindness about assumptions that no one can overcome (sufficiently)⁴⁵ yet that ironically may enable a writer's greatest insights.⁴⁶ Or we find the helpless incorporation of antithetical elements ("the supplement"⁴⁷) into a theory at precisely its most crucial moments, with the effect that the theory threatens to unravel. In general, the tension between what writers command and do not command in language is often resolved by language in favor of itself.⁴⁸

For myself, I prefer to stress the difficulties of understanding intricate and complex subjects honestly—say, political life in general or some significant particular—rather than the imperatives of language. Conscious response to theoretical necessity is not the same as unconscious bondage to the imperatives of language. More directly, sometimes we can convert these manifestations of failure into manifestations of something else: not success, not failure, but quasi-deficiency. Then, too, what sometimes looks like a quasi-deficiency turns out to be a deliberate concession. The impact on the theory may be as harsh, but at least the writer knew what was being done. And sometimes, determining whether a moment in a text is a quasi-deficiency or a deliberate concession is impossible.

For example, when Mill confessed to doubt about his ability to handle certain questions that arise when his idea of personal liberty confronts the claims of public decency, how should we regard his *aporia*? He wrote that "Fornication, for example, must be tolerated, and so must gambling; but should a person be free to be a pimp, or to keep a gambling-house? The case is one of those which lie on the exact boundary line between two principles, and it is not at once apparent to which of the two it properly belongs."⁴⁹ He conceded the force of arguments that would compel certain parties to "conduct their operations with a certain degree of secrecy and mystery" in order to avoid prosecution.⁵⁰ Earlier in the text, he had already

conceded that the state could prohibit violations of good manners.⁵¹ Thus he seemed not only to concede the force of arguments apparently foreign to his theory but to accept a conclusion apparently repelled by his theory. How could manners be subject to regulation by a libertarian state? Without stopping, he added that his concessions still bother him: "I will not venture to decide whether they are sufficient to justify the moral anomaly of punishing the accessory, when the principal is (and must be) allowed to go free; of fining or imprisoning the procurer, but not the fornicator, the gambling-house keeper, but not the gambler."⁵²

How should we regard this *aporia*? Whatever else can be said, Mill did consciously face the difficulty. He was not the victim of a linguistic system. He did not, however, simply formulate adversarial arguments that he could then expertly refute. These arguments exact a theoretical cost. How aware was he of the full cost of suddenly allowing manners to be a fit object of state regulation? Was he blinded by prudishness when making this concession? On the contrary, he could be read to say, if not in so many words, that concessions must be made on some matters; that, though a basic principle can go very far, it cannot go the limit of its logic without perversion; that these concessions, because they are minor, and even though they disclose that no single principle is sufficient, still do not discredit the principle. One goes this way and that in the effort to describe this moment in the text. The existence of an aporetic moment induces in the reader an *aporia* about the nature of the aporetic moment. At the least, however, it is plausible to maintain that Mill made deliberate concessions and that they do not dismantle his whole theory but enrich it. They encourage readers in a readiness to look only for loose guidance; they help to establish the methodological point that a theory can succeed only on certain terms.

Blindness about assumptions is too vast a matter for more than a brief remark here. The great Socratic project of examination and self-examination has been promoted by Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud with such power that they have importantly altered the whole subject of blindness to assumptions. They seem to have cut us off from all predecessor generations, and they play a major role in recent literary theory. What can we say here? Inevitably, writers must start somewhere. Hence they must assume more than they can demonstrate, must be unaware of how their assumptions will look to future generations, and must not always know what they are assuming. Accordingly, we must govern our expectations of theory. But philosophy and political theory will go on, regardless of how insistently literary theory pushes the theme of blindness. The profusion of conflicting theories alone can work to avoid complacency about assumptions.

Last, in regard to a theory's incorporation of antithetical elements that threaten to unravel it, much could be said because many specimens could

be found. Some of the more notorious occur: when Plato noted the tyrannical wishes in the philosopher's dream-life, as if to say that the philosopher is the tyrant, not the tyrant's complete opposite; when Hobbes deployed the notion that there is one right a person can never be obliged to renounce, the right to self-preservation, and thus strained tremendously his doctrine of punishment, his view of conscription, and his defense of unhesitating obedience to a kingly sovereignty which remains institutionally unchecked; when Locke introduced the notion of executive prerogative, which may act against the laws; when Rousseau erected an executive power that seems to make the sovereign people little more than a rubber stamp, and when he defined (moral) freedom as obedience; or when Marx wrote of the relative freedom of Louis Napoleon's state from every class's interest.

In every case, something happens that, if pressed by the determined reader, may cause the theoretical edifice to collapse—or at least, sustain great damage. How is the reader to regard these moments? Derrida, in discussing certain ingredients in Rousseau's treatment of the origins of language, maintains that: "*He declares what he wishes to say . . . (H)e says or describes that which he does not wish to say.*"⁵³ How widely applicable is this formula to moments when antithetical elements emerge? Is the theorist *mastered* either by the imperatives of language or by the difficulties of theoretical understanding?

I doubt that any general formula is applicable. We must examine case by case. To say this is to sound indecisive, I know. Yet I believe that, as in the cases just mentioned, theorists are in command of what they are doing. They want to achieve effects not easily designated. They do not want, as we say, to have it both ways. They are not looking for a compromise. On the other hand, they are not outwitting themselves. What then? Let us say that they are prepared to have their entire systems called into doubt—after giving their readers, along the way, much to think about that would not otherwise have been in play. Perhaps Plato, in *The Republic*, answers to this description. The other cases seem to be closer to self-unravelling, or avoid it only by some desperate strategem. Thus, Hobbes suggested that the unrenounceable right does not, unlike all others, necessarily establish a corresponding duty for others to respect it. Trying to narrow the scope of prerogative, Locke argued explicitly that people, not their authorities, have the last word as to when political wrong has been done. Rousseau would institutionalize an annual assembly to scrutinize executive authority; and about freedom-as-obedience, he allowed that even preponderant lawmaking majorities may be wrong. Marx developed considerations that could conceivably provide *theoretical* constraints on the theoretical conclusion that political power is always the servant of the economically dominant class.

If these characterizations are accepted, then we can still say that these are not simple inconsistencies. Nor are they gaps or discrepancies that had to appear without the theorists' awareness and in spite of their rigid purposiveness. Could we not say that these moments mark the true appearance of theorists as theorists—the true appearance of honesty? Honesty has forced them into their deficiencies. Coming from their strength of mind, these are only quasi-deficiencies.

Yet suppose that not only Plato but other great theorists have been making concessions because they have known that any theory must deliberately incorporate antithetical elements, even if it cannot reconcile them all or in every respect. The absence of such elements is the true sign of a theory's failure: the failure to be a theory. Theorists know that they cannot have the world just as they would like it. I do not say that every theory embraces, and must embrace, opposed extremities: that would be overly romantic. I say only that enduring theories are deliberately not simple. Is it too much to insist that the theorist, as theorist, is multiple, many-minded? To avoid rigidities in the study of political theory, Yeats's words should be treasured:

You ask what makes me sigh, old friend,
 What makes me shudder so?
 I shudder and I sigh to think
 That even Cicero
 And many-minded Homer were
Mad as the mist and snow.

A theory is mist and snow: its motion is wayward, its touch light, its effect inspiring.

Notes

1. PT, 134-135. I want to thank Professor John A. Cameron and Thomas A. Pepper for many hours of helpful discussion about the themes of this essay.
2. PT, 159. Gunnell's skepticism is deeper in a later essay. "But with the collapse of the paradigm of the tradition, there may be grave questions about the extent it is possible to discover any coherent subject matter and any practical reasons for studying it." (IHPT, 326.) This essay contains a sharp critique of Quentin Skinner's view of texts as speech acts, but Gunnell's objections are differently motivated from mine.
3. PT, 158.

4. PT, 147.
5. PT, 150.
6. PT, 142.
7. PT.
8. PT, 156.
9. PT, 136.
10. PT, 160.
11. PT, 161.
12. PT.
13. MMST, 54.
14. I refer to Malraux's famous discussion of the way photographic reproduction transforms the study of art by making works from all periods and styles concurrently available in a "musée imaginaire." Cf. André Malraux. *The Voices of Silence*, Gilbert Stuart, trans., Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press, (1953), 1978. The complexities of transferring Malraux's concept to the study of literary texts is discussed in: Donald Davie, *The Poet in the Imaginary Museum*, Barry Alpert, ed., New York, Persea, 1977, 45-56.
15. Cf. John Dunn, "The Identity of the History of Ideas," *Philosophy, Politics and Society*, Fourth Series, Peter Laslett, W. G. Runciman, and Quentin Skinner, eds., Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1972, 158-173.
16. J.G.A. Pocock, "Political Theory, History, and Myth: A Salute to John Gunnell," *Annals of Scholarship*, 1, 4, Fall, 1980, 3-25, on 23. Cf. Pocock, *Politics, Language and Time*, New York, Atheneum Press, 1973, 11, 17.
17. *Ibid.*, 23ff.
18. Pocock, "Political Theory, History, and Myth," 17.
19. *Ibid.*
20. Quentin Skinner, "Hermeneutics and the Role of History," *New Literary History*, 7, 1, Autumn, 1975, 209-232, on 222ff.
21. *Ibid.*, 212.
22. *Ibid.*, 221.
23. Quentin Skinner, "Some Problems in the Analysis of Political Thought and Action," *Political Theory*, 2, 3, August, 1974, 227-303, on 283. This article is part of a symposium. See the valuable criticisms made of Skinner by Jonathan M. Wiener and Gordon Schochet in the same issue.
24. Skinner, "Hermeneutics and the Role of History," 219.
25. *Ibid.*

26. Skinner, "Some Problems . . .," 289.
27. Quentin Skinner, "Motives, Intentions and the Interpretation of Texts," *New Literary History*, 3, 2, Winter, 1972, 393-408, on 406.
28. Skinner, "Hermeneutics and the Role of History," 221; Skinner, "Some Problems . . .," 299.
29. *Ibid.*, 293.
30. Skinner, "Motives, Intentions . . .," 405, 396.
31. Skinner, "Some Problems . . .," 296-301.
32. Henry James, "Preface to *The Tragic Muse*," *The Art of the Novel*, New York, Scribner's, 1962, 84.
33. For the view that a reader should "take seriously the possibility that (the theorist) was right," that the theorist's "teaching is the true teaching," see: Leo Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing*, Glencoe, IL, Free Press, 1952, 154, 152. Strauss had Spinoza in mind, but his formulation has a wider reference.
34. Leo Strauss, *What Is Political Philosophy?*, Glencoe, IL, Free Press, 1959, 11-12.
35. *Ibid.*, 13.
36. *Ibid.*, 11.
37. *Ibid.*, 40.
38. *Ibid.*, 29.
39. For Strauss's notion of "reading between the lines," see: *Persecution and the Art of Writing*, 30, *passim*; *What Is Political Philosophy?*, 221-232. This notion is particularly useful when taken to mean that we must sometimes search for the real life hidden in a text because, deliberately or not, a discrepancy exists between the stated aims of theorists and their actual achievement or between their overt distribution of attention and emphasis and their principal theoretical ambitions. Thus, their intellectual manners may teach something in addition to, in contrast with, or even better than their doctrines or conclusions. For a related view, see: Louis Althusser, "The 'Piccolo Teatro': Bertolazzi and Brecht," *For Marx*, Ben Brewster, trans., New York, Random House, 1970, 131-160.
40. Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing*, 36.
41. On deconstruction, I have found helpful: Barbara Johnson's introduction to Jacques Derrida, *Dissemination*, Barbara Johnson, trans., Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1981; Christopher Norris, *Deconstruction*, London, Methuen, 1982; Michael Ryan, *Marxism and Deconstruction*, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982.
42. Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, Gayatri C. Spivak, trans., Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976, 217, 229, 246. Also of special interest to students of political theory is Derrida's "Plato's Pharmacy," *Dissemination*, 63-171.

43. Paul de Man, *Blindness and Insight*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1971, 141.
44. This is the basic strategy of de Man's *Allegories of Reading*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1979.
45. Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 163-164; de Man, *Blindness and Insight*, 109.
46. *Ibid.*
47. Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 163-164, *passim*.
48. *Ibid.*, 158.
49. John Stuart Mill, "On Liberty," *The Philosophy of John Stuart Mill*, Marshall Cohen, ed., New York, Random House, 1961, 185-319, on 299-300.
50. *Ibid.*, 301.
51. *Ibid.*, 298.
52. *Ibid.*, 301.
53. Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 229.

CHAPTER VI

Philosophy, Political Theory, and Practice

RICHARD E. FLATHMAN

Several contributors to this volume remark on a largish inconsistency within Gunnell's presentation: his final chapter of *Political Theory: Tradition and Interpretation* appears to reintroduce and to endorse a conception of political theory remarkably similar to the one he denounces as mythological in earlier chapters. Reactions to this circumstance range from bewilderment to the sharply framed contention that the last chapter is (in Mannheim's sense) ideologically motivated and written in bad faith. I, too, find disjunctions and discordant positions in Gunnell's presentation. But my interest is only secondarily in the mutual compatibility of Gunnell's several discussions of political theory's history and how we should understand and respond to it. Nor will I do more than comment in passing on Gunnell's expressly stated belief that political theory as he characterizes it in Chapter V is an admirable albeit increasingly rare and difficult mode of human performance.

My concern, rather, is with the distinctions he draws between political theorizing so characterized and various other modes of political reflection, investigation, and analysis; more particularly, my concern is with his tendency to dismiss or sharply to diminish those modes that differ from theorizing as he describes it. As with a number of other writers who have asked themselves what political theory is, Gunnell betrays a tendency to think that there is one proper—or at least one best—way to answer this question. Gunnell's discussion demonstrates yet again that this tendency mainly produces undefended stipulations, invidious comparisons, and disdainful rejections of differing but compatible and even complementary enterprises. More happily, his discussion also takes us into a number of less sectarian matters that will repay our attention.

I

I begin with the categories that Gunnell uses to sort and to assess the several modes of reflection and expression that have been denominated "political theory." His most general distinction, which encompasses almost his entire discussion, is between "merely academic" studies in, of, or (as he prefers to say) about political topics and political theory as an activity with pronounced, insistent, political objectives that are in principle practical or instrumental, not merely theoretical. He draws this distinction primarily in terms of the intentions and objectives of the theorist, in part in terms of further characteristics that theorists with such intentions and objectives have typically displayed.

"[A]cademic political theory (as distinguished from political theory as a dimension of political activity) . . . is largely a second-order enterprise that involves writing *about* politics and political theory in a first-order sense."¹ Gunnell then introduces a further distinction within the category "merely academic." If the academics in question are of a philosophical bent, they are likely to address "abstract academic issues"² rather than concrete, real problems that present themselves in the world of political life and affairs. If the academics are of a historical outlook, they may study issues and events that were real for the actors engaged with them in the past; but as historians, they distance themselves from the practical character of what they study. In the case of academic historical studies in political theory, this takes the form of treating the classic works of genuine, first-order political theory as "merely" an aspect of the history of ideas.³ Gunnell draws the contrast with the intentions of first-order Political Theorists (hereafter capitalized both for convenience of reference and to signal the larger-than-life dimensions of these heroic figures) in what he clearly intends to be bold and sharp relief. Possessed of (by?) a "demiurgic vision" and bearing a "terrifying responsibility,"⁴ the Political Theorist aims not only to "reconstitute" the "political order" as it presents itself in the Theorist's time and place, but to "annul political time,"⁵ thereby sealing the "cosmic rupture" that permitted humankind to "fall into history."⁶

One may observe in passing that these objectives are perhaps not narrowly or immediately "practical," even that a certain abstractness exists about them. However this may be, those capable of framing such grand intentions, able genuinely to make such objectives and purposes their own, will have to be supplied with some pretty remarkable qualities and characteristics. Gunnell could not be accused of stint in this regard. Political Theorists are of course endowed with powerful minds. But they are no mere philosophers who, "like Aristotle," approach politics "as one object of analysis" among many. Typically disaffected and often banished from

political life in their societies, Political Theorists combine the qualities of Hebrew prophet, suffering servant, Bunyanesque Pilgrim, agent of human redemption, subverter and yet personification of political society, creative artist, master illusionist and alchemist more reminiscent of Frankenstein than of a scientist, nevertheless hard-nosed realists who do not shrink from that violence which, as we have all been taught but only some of us have learned, must be done in order to perform creative acts.⁷

Despite this imposing array of attributes, Political Theorists characteristically fail in their endeavors. They have played a "largely symbolic part" in the human drama and have had "little impact" on events. Their theorizing-cum-acting is a species of "serious play," perhaps in part compensatory fantasizing or neurotic displacement⁸ and hence "a kind of madness."⁹ And one does sense that Gunnell takes a certain comfort, a degree of reassurance, from the infrequent appearance and all but inevitable failure of Political Theorists. As he describes them, these Theorists are certainly daunting figures; had they been—or were they to become—more numerous and more successful in their cosmic quests, the more mundane of our species would have a lot of scrambling to do. Yet Gunnell laments what he believes to be the (almost entire?) absence of Political Theorists from the contemporary scene and his comparisons with their pallid academic successors and counterparts are sharply to the detriment of the latter.¹⁰ Certainly these abstract, bland, and faint-hearted academics cannot do for (to?) us what Political Theorists have done. The best we can hope for, it seems, is keeping the memory of Political Theory alive by recognizing its classic practitioners for the extraordinary figures they were.

II

Taken as he presents it (that is, as an "analytically derived" yet historically verisimilitudinous "group portrait"), Gunnell's representation of the Political Theorist is not unfamiliar. As his sometime teacher Sheldon Wolin complains, anyone acquainted with Wolin's own account of "epic political theory"¹¹ will find much that is recognizable in Gunnell's sketch. But the historicity of these depictions is highly controversial—and not only among those who are keenly self-conscious and stringent about the criteria of historicity and historical veracity.

To consider only the leading case, Gunnell accepts Wolin's view that Plato is the prototypical Political Theorist; but he does not confront the understanding, widely accepted at least since Pascal, that Plato was a deeply antipolitical man who took an interest in politics only in the hope of making the city safe for what really mattered to him, namely philosophy.

There is a forceful expression of this view of Plato in Hannah Arendt's posthumous *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*.¹² Arendt quotes the entirety of Pascal's estimate, which directly contradicts Gunnell's characterization of Plato as an intensely political figure worlds removed from the "merely academic" or "merely philosophical" temperament.

We can only think of Plato and Aristotle in grand academic robes. They were honest men . . . laughing with their friends, and when they wanted to divert themselves, they wrote the Laws or the Politics, to amuse themselves. That part of their lives was the least philosophic and the least serious. The most philosophic [thing] was to live simply and quietly. If they wrote on politics, it was as if laying down rules for a lunatic asylum; if they presented the appearance of speaking of great matters, it was because they knew that the madmen to whom they spoke thought they were kings and emperors. They entered into their principles in order to make their madness as little harmful as possible.¹³

Arendt herself, who of course was no friend of the antipolitical and indeed antiworldly stance that Pascal described and endorsed, commented that "Pascal's words, . . . [while] . . . "fresh in both meanings of the word, and sarcastic, may have exaggerated the matter a bit but did not miss the mark."¹⁴ Gunnell cannot be unaware of this interpretation of his foremost instance of a Political Theorist and some response to it would seem desirable. If his claim is that his account of Political Theory is historically based, it is well for him to have—and to show that he has—his history in an accurate condition.

More important for present purposes, Gunnell does not seriously entertain the understanding that stands in yet sharper conflict with the position he advances. This is the view that both philosophical reflection and serious historical study are different in kind from and categorically incompatible with pursuit of the practical or instrumental objectives Gunnell attributes to Plato and other members of his Pantheon of Political Theorists. A Christianized variant of this view informs Pascal's reading of Plato. "Practical" politics consists of a confused concatenation of ephemeral and unintelligible particulars. Any who, like Plato and Pascal, have grasped the distinctions between appearance and reality or opinion and knowledge (Plato), between the transient and the eternal or the vulgar and the sublime (Pascal), will understand this. They will realize the futility of attempts to find rational order within or bring such order out of this chaos, and they will concern themselves with politics only to the extent necessary to protect their philosophical (or spiritual or mathematical) endeavors from its intrusions. Their political activities will be in the service of philosophy (in Pascal's case, of the spiritual and the mathematical), of reason and truth; but the activities will neither be philosophical nor yield anything rational

in itself (such as knowledge or truth). These people will employ pejorative qualifiers such as "merely," "abstract," and even "impractical," not of their philosophizing but of such political activities as circumstances impose upon them.

Perhaps the most unqualified version of this view, at least in recent times, is that advanced by a writer whom Gunnell occasionally quotes, namely Michael Oakeshott. Oakeshott does not dismiss politics or any other aspect of "practical life" as irrational or meaningless. Practical life is a "mode" of experience; the thought that we could dismiss it (or any other such mode or anything whatever in experience) is a deep misunderstanding to think that philosophy, theory,¹⁶ or historical study could provide guidance to practice.¹⁷ If Gunnell's group portrait of Plato, Machiavelli, Hobbes, and others is correct (as in Oakeshott's view, it is certainly correct concerning Karl Marx's intentions), then these figures would have committed—on a massive scale—the most vitiating of all mistakes, the *ignoratio elenchi*. For this, they would properly be regarded not as philosophers or political theorists but as that most contemptible yet dangerous of types, the theoretician.¹⁸

I do not endorse Oakeshott's austere and severely restricting understandings of philosophy, theory, historical study, and the relationship between them and conduct in "practical" life. Later in this essay, I sketch a view according to which theorizing about politics is neither irrelevant to political practice nor, as Gunnell stipulates, by definition politically *engagé*. I mention Oakeshott's position as a reminder that Gunnell, despite his frequently dismissive remarks about philosophy, is in fact taking a position on a time-honored philosophical question and making that position integral to his conception of Political Theory. As usual in such matters, his position can be no better than the arguments he is able to give against the major competing views. The questions cannot be addressed by presenting evidence about the intentions and other characteristics of historical figures and then stipulating that political theory and theorizing are what those figures did.¹⁹

III

A rather different understanding of the theory-practice relationship emerges when Gunnell takes up historiographical reflections which pose a deep challenge to his sketch of Political Theory, that is, when he responds to the arguments of Pocock, Dunn, and especially Skinner. It is the position of the last-mentioned of these writers that a major part of the historian's task is to ascertain the intentions of past writers on politics. Although what we have seen thus far might suggest that Gunnell accepts this view,

he in fact argues (here putting at least one foot into what are undeniably philosophical waters) that it reflects a discredited Cartesian understanding of intentions as mental events or acts. He does not elaborate his own position in any detail but associates himself with the doctrine ("which comes close to my position") that "intentionality is a function of language not an expression in language of a mental state,"²⁰ that "mental predicates are attributes of language."²¹

Although perhaps improving on the Cartesian doctrine with which he contrasts them, these formulae are unsatisfactory in ways that cause troubles of their own. Through language, we can distinguish intentions from other things and one intention from another; we frame and sometimes announce and attribute intentions in language; there is probably some truth to the fashionable but difficult to formulate idea that the language we in fact speak places limits on the intentions we can form—or at least are at all likely to form. For these reasons, the study of the language that past political theorists shared with their contemporaries is undoubtedly relevant to recovering their intentions in writing. But I take Gadamer to be saying, or at least Gunnell to be endorsing, a doctrine far more problematical than the propositions I have just stated. If I understand his brief remarks, they advance the view that you and I are essentially vehicles through which "language" expresses "its" intentions. If so, Gunnell gives us a reification that, to mention only one of its difficulties, makes it impossible to account for what Wittgenstein called the "prodigious diversity" of uses which speakers of a language make of it.²²

Whatever else we may think about the notion that "mental predicates are attributes of language," it stands in some tension with Gunnell's account of Political Theory. We have seen that his distinction between the Political Theorist and lesser lights such as philosophers, thinkers, critics, and academics is drawn largely in terms of the intentions characteristic of each. Gunnell is confident not only that he can and should but that he has (correctly) identified the intentions (at least, the generic intentions) of Plato, Machiavelli, Hobbes, and company in distinction from those of non-Political Theorists; his taxonomy and argument depend on his having done so. This singling out, this celebrating, of the distinctive intentions of a tiny group of writer-actors is not what would be expected from someone committed to the Gadamerian doctrine just discussed. Certainly Gunnell owes us a more detailed account not only of why he is so interested in intentions but of the way his Political Theorists managed to frame intentions that set them so sharply apart from other users of the particular languages of which they were speakers and that united them with one another despite striking differences among the languages they severally spoke.

Gunnell's discussion of language and intention is an instance of a wider and, in my judgment, unfortunate tendency in his thinking about political theory. He is suspicious of philosophy and wants to distinguish political theory from it. But his suspicions and distinctions are themselves grounded in philosophical positions, and these positions influence his account of political theory. This tendency manifests itself in a most clear and, again in my judgment, unsatisfactory manner in his dismissal of recent work in political theory that has been highly self-conscious about its philosophical commitments and assumptions. As a transition to considering Gunnell's assessment of this literature, let me look briefly at Gunnell's response to the philosophically informed historiography of J.G.A. Pocock.

In *Political Theory*, Gunnell puts little emphasis on the differences between Pocock and Skinner and is quite critical of both. But his later response to Pocock's "salute" is much more conciliatory, and he concludes by endorsing for the most part the conception of the historian's task that Pocock has elaborated.²³ Gunnell has "no great disagreement"²⁴ with this project and even comes around to allowing that Pocock's kind of historical studies of "how [P]olitical [T]heory actually happened in history . . . may be the best way" to pursue that residual possibility mentioned earlier, namely keeping alive an appreciation of "the character of a creative mind's engagement with politics and . . . a sense of the possibility, or ideal, of a reconstitution of political life."²⁵ This stance does not comport well with his book's emphasis on intentions, but if we focus instead on the independent significance Gunnell (sometimes) assigns to language, his agreement with Pocock as distinct from Skinner is not entirely surprising. Pocock's stated purpose, after all, is to study "the history of political thought as a history of linguistic performances carried out in linguistic [among other] contexts."²⁶ This is still a rather considerable distance from both Gadamer and Foucault, but it is hard to see how someone with Gunnell's views about language could reject it entirely.

What is surprising in this perspective is that the very pages which express these accommodating views give vent to some of Gunnell's most unqualified and acerbic denunciations of activities that are currently passing themselves off as political theory.

[T]he trend in the field about which I am most skeptical, and which often is placed under the category of normative political theory, involves a wide range of material including the work of individuals as diverse as John Rawls and Jurgen Habermas as well as numerous conceptual analyses characteristic of the British analytical tradition and recent trends in metaethics. These post-positivist philosophical arguments about power, justice, authority, freedom, and the whole panoply of philosophical concepts for talking about politics and political ideas carry the distinct implication that they are the product of "doing" political theory in some first-order

sense and that they are extending a tradition of discourse from Plato to Marx which was addressing the same concepts and problems. This is a version of the myth of the tradition with which I did not deal in the book but which has gained an immense but, in my judgment, unreflective popularity. Its implied contact with actual political problems and historical events seems largely illusory no matter how 'political' or socially engaged its language or how evaluative and prescriptive its tone. Not only does it fail to make contact with concrete political issues in any clearly demonstrable manner, but it abstracts from, and imposes upon, its putative predecessors such as Hobbes and Locke a set of philosophical motives and concerns that arise from an academic tradition and which distorts the actual character of the enterprise in which they were engaged and the political context in which they acted.²⁷

It is by comparison with this approach that Pocock's historical studies are preferred by Gunnell.

If we take these remarks seriously (which requires blinking their somewhat undifferentiated and largely *ex cathedra* character), we must ask how they comport with the philosophical views we have been discussing and what they show about the adequacy of those views. As Gunnell says, at least some of the self-designated theorists he has in mind *claim* not only to "make contact with" political problems but to "engage" them in an evaluative and prescriptive manner. This appears to mean that these writers aim to speak to, not merely about, politics. Gunnell is not accusing these writers of (crediting them with?) deception or insincerity in these respects; the verdict he actually renders against them is rather different, namely that they are often pretentious. Thus he allows that their intentions bear at least some small resemblance to the intentions of his heroic Political Theorists.

Perhaps, then, the assessments just quoted are an expression of that part of Gunnell's thinking which assigns to language a highly influential, if not decisive, role in the formation of intentions, ideas, and other "mental" states. As we have seen, he characterizes the language of these writers as no more than "political," not genuinely political, and says it consists of philosophical concepts used to talk about politics not the concepts of politics itself.²⁸ Perhaps, then, these writers have been captured by an academic, philosophical, or other mode of language that defeats their announced intentions. Clearly something like this is part of Gunnell's view. In the next section, I speculate about Gunnell's overall position, attempting to combine a version of this theme with his more general concluding remarks about contemporary societies. But the matter is puzzling in ways that transcend the language-intention relationship. For the very concepts (power, justice, authority, and freedom) that he here describes as no more than "political," as merely philosophical concepts for talking about politics, he earlier characterized as "basic political concepts."²⁹

We are presented, in short, with something of a conundrum. How can it be that a large group of writers who not only intend to speak to politics but who use "basic political concepts" nevertheless fail to "make contact" with politics, giving us no more than abstract and otherwise insignificant talk about it? On some of the views with which Gunnell associates himself, "making contact" with politics would consist in using the language of politics, the language in which politics takes place. Gunnell's suggestion that writers such as Rawls and Habermas (Hart and Hare? or Benn and Scanlon? or Connolly and Pitkin?) are or could be "merely academic" or "merely philosophical" would be regarded by Gadamer and Foucault as not only inconsistent but absurd.³⁰ True, few if any of the recent writers whom Gunnell seems to have in mind display the heroic qualities he attributes to Political Theorists. Moreover, their performances may prove to have no more lasting significance than Judith Shklar finds in the life and thought of most of the seventeenth-century Englishmen to whom Pocock's studies have called our attention.³¹ But by the criteria Gunnell seems to be employing generally, and clearly is employing when he questions Skinner's method and endorses what he understands to be Pocock's historiography, such writings are undeniably political.

IV

The several elements of Gunnell's stated position seem to be disjunctive, if not irreconcilable. That is, I have thus far been unable to fashion from them a satisfactory solution to the puzzle as to why Gunnell denies contemporary writers standing as Political Theorists, or at least political theorists, worthy of attention. In this circumstance, I first offer a speculation concerning what might be called the non- or extra-philosophical impetus behind Gunnell's pronouncements and then make some remarks about the philosophical questions raised by his discussion.

Possibly Gunnell's dissatisfaction with "postpositivist philosophical" writers who claim to do political theory is less an inference from his philosophical views or his views about the internal characteristics of political theory than a symptom of his antipathy toward the "open" societies in which such work has flourished. Although far less explicit and emphatic in his antimodernism than writers such as Robert Nisbet, Ivan Illich, and Alasdair MacIntyre, Gunnell laments the "soft despotism" of mass society that "oppresses by ignoring," "levels the significance of events," and can no longer distinguish between the bizarre and the commonplace. If someone inclined to and capable of Political Theory did appear on this dismal scene, he would be "not unlike Sophocles's Ajax, a hero without a field of action

or anyone to notice him if he does act.”³² Politically bland writing such as Rawls’s and Habermas’s is just what one would expect in such circumstances. Despite their intentions and their use of what have traditionally been among the basic concepts of political life, these writers are only “political,” not genuinely political, because in our times there is only “politics,” not politics.³³

I leave the merits of this speculation to Gunnell himself; whatever they may be, questions arise in Gunnell’s book that are worthy of attention—irrespective of whether one is afflicted with cultural *angst*. Of these, I confine myself to the issues about theory and practice which appear above. In Gunnell’s terms, they concern his pejorative notions “philosophical” and “abstract” as opposed to the “concrete,” “real,” or “political” plus his notion of “talking about” politics as opposed to “doing” political theory. My strategy is to consider briefly some well-developed formulations in which distinctions such as these play a more carefully delineated role, thereby hoping to put Gunnell’s use of them in perspective and to determine what might be involved in defending them adequately. I will not be able to give the various formulations the critical scrutiny they deserve; but perhaps setting them in juxtaposition to one another and to Gunnell’s presentation will help to clarify assumptions and implications.

A schematic recapitulation of views already encountered concerning theory and practice would be on this order. Oakeshott holds that philosophizing and theorizing are categorically distinct from and can have no bearing on practical life. Gunnell’s official view about what he calls philosophy is that it is neither necessary nor impossible that it have “something to say to politics.”³⁴ As we have seen, however, he frequently disparages philosophy and political theory for their abstractness and contrasts them unfavorably with Political Theory, partly defined by its ability to speak to politics. Thus he disagrees with Oakeshott’s view that philosophy and theory *cannot* speak to politics and argues emphatically that they *should* do so. In short, his position seems to be generically the same as that shared by an otherwise unlikely pair: Karl Marx and David Easton or other proponents of “causal” and value-neutral political theory. The former urged philosophy to begin changing a world it had heretofore only interpreted; the latter press for theory that explains politics as well as or instead of prescribing to it. A third understanding already noted is that which I attributed to Foucault: namely that, willy nilly, philosophy speaks not only to but in politics; philosophy cannot avoid being political.

All of these lines of argument overlook salient considerations or fail to respect vital distinctions. Oakeshott’s argument that philosophy can have no bearing on practical life confutes itself at least in that, if accepted, it would secure practical life against attempts that philosophers might otherwise

make to rule or influence practical life. Moving out from this point, the whole panoply of Oakeshott's distinctions—of the several modes of experience from one another and from experience without modification or arrest, of process from practice, of *societas* from *universitas*, etc.—teach us how and, more particularly, how not to conceive of experience. By giving shape to the world of ideas that is experience, or (better) by disabusing us of and providing us with prophylactics against distortions and derangements of that world, philosophy has an indirect but nevertheless fundamental effect on practical life (as well as on history, science, poetry, and every other mode). This point can be put in more general terms by using Marx's language against Oakeshott in addition to Marx himself. Taken at all literally, the claim that understandings can be "mere" in the sense of having no bearing on practice is an egregious misunderstanding. Insofar as philosophy or theory clarifies, amends, or "merely" articulates understandings, it not only "makes contact" with but changes our world. If understood in this way, the Nietzschean aphorism noticed earlier would command assent.

Of course, the foregoing contentions do not imply that there is no appropriate use for expressions such as "merely academic" and "merely philosophical." Leaving aside our "talk about" the weather, academic work (whether philosophical or otherwise) can certainly be trivial and insignificant, can in fact be of interest or consequence to or for no one. Except by sheer stipulation, however, this possibility does not distinguish such work from any other mode of thought, activity, or endeavor. The point is that such assessments must be made instance by instance, using stated and defended criteria. In principle, it is possible that the entire (rather heterogeneous) array of writing that Gunnell calls "postpositivist" philosophizing about political questions is empty and inconsequential. But Gunnell's judgment to this effect can take no support from his assertion that such work is merely "about" politics. Yet Gunnell offers no other support for the judgment.

To recognize that philosophizing can be insignificant is enough to discredit the third position, attributed to Foucault. Even if we accept Foucault's inflated conception of "politics" and "the political," some philosophy could be so manifestly ill-considered, idle, or silly that—if it did attract attention—it would be immediately dismissed and thereafter ignored. (This is not to deny Foucault's acuity in discerning the significance of ideas, understandings, and practices that others have neglected. His disposition to posit and pursue the significance of human performances is preferable to Gunnell's tendency to dismiss whole bodies of reflection as unworthy of attention.) In sum, neither the "musts" nor the "can'ts," the necessities nor the impossibilities, that we are considering are so much as plausible.

With these very general considerations in mind, let us return to Gunnell's argument and especially to his negative assessment of philosophy in general and postpositivist philosophizing about politics in particular. In the foregoing terms, Gunnell offers a doubly hybrid version of the view that political theory *ought* to speak to politics. First, he strongly suggests that current philosophizing (and probably philosophizing *per se*) will all but invariably fail to make contact with politics. Second, by a persuasive definition (reminiscent of the illusionists he admires), he transmutes his "ought" for political theory into a "must." To follow these two moves and their combined effects, let us consider more closely Oakeshott's contention that "practical philosophy" (*praxis*) is a contradiction in terms and Wittgenstein's very different argument to what many have taken as the same conclusion.

I have argued that philosophizing after the fashion of Oakeshott has practical significance because it helps to clarify the difference between philosophy and other activities. More generally, by articulating the world of ideas that is experience, it fends off misunderstandings and misadventures in our activities. (The most widely known instance of such fending off is Oakeshott's blistering assault on "rationalism.") But to say this is to take advantage of an ambiguity in "practice" and "practical." Oakeshott's philosophical articulations are intended to be from the perspective of experience as a whole; they identify the practical as one distinctive mode of Experience. Because they are to identify the suppositions or postulates of that mode as such, they cannot speak to or even about the differentia of any instance of that mode, for example, French politics in the seventeenth century or British politics in the nineteenth century.

In this respect, Oakeshott's argument that philosophy *cannot* speak to practice is an especially deep and stringent version of an argument familiar from many sources (for example, the Scholastic argument that casuistry must mediate between moral philosophy and moral conduct, the jurisprudential argument that neither judges nor others can derive a decision about a particular case exclusively from the general and prospective language of a statute or other legal rule, and even the elementary logical principle that a syllogism requires a minor premise) hardly disputable. Thus Oakeshott's reflections about "rationalism" are categorical: they are addressed not to anyone in particular or to everyone but to anyone. If by "philosophy," Gunnell means anything like what Oakeshott means (and there are suggestions that he does), then Gunnell is doubly wrong about it: wrong to condemn it as impractical at the categorical level and wrong to expect it to be practical at the particular level.

The pertinent question about Oakeshott's conception of philosophy is not whether it can or should be "practical" in either sense but whether

it is possible at all. Can human beings achieve so much as a fleeting glimpse of experience as a whole, of experience without modification or arrest? Or is human reflection ineluctably particular ("abstract" rather than "concrete" as Oakeshott would say)? Obviously, I cannot deal adequately with this enormously complex question. But readers of this collection will know how widely and emphatically this possibility has been rejected in twentieth- and even nineteenth-century philosophy. Phenomenology, the various modes of historicism and contextualism, most if not all variants of pragmatism, virtually all of the many doctrines that give questions of meaning and interpretation philosophical centrality: all of these and more insist (at least officially and programmatically) that reflection takes its possibility, its basic character, and especially its limits from a tradition, culture, form of life, language, paradigm, or the like. Even natural science, which (absurdly in Oakeshott's view) has in this period been regarded as the legatee of the aspiration to universality if not genuine "concreteness," is increasingly said to be culture- (or in some other way) specific. (I suspect that Oakeshott's allegiance to the aspiration to concreteness goes far to explain the neglect of *Experience and Its Modes*. I might add that neglecting that work all but guarantees misunderstanding his later writings.)

Many have thought that, by abandoning the idealist quest for understanding at the level of the whole, philosophy became, at least potentially, more practical. If philosophy is not only permitted but required to speak of and to particulars, the "in" principle or logical impossibility of its being in any way practical disappears. Certainly this is the view of Marxism and of all versions of *praxis* philosophy known to me; in less programmatically explicit forms, it informs much of the writing published in journals such as *Philosophy and Public Affairs* and in burgeoning subfields of philosophy such as "medical ethics," "legal philosophy," and "social philosophy."

I do not know whether Gunnell would generalize his dismissal of recent political theorizing to include these tendencies and developments, but it may serve our purposes to consider a further position, Wittgenstein's, that has influenced many of the writers just alluded to as well as many of those Gunnell castigates. Although seeming to reject anything like Oakeshott's conception of philosophy, this position makes credible Gunnell's dismissal of the work it influences, because it insists that philosophy "leaves everything as it is."³⁵

"I set the brake up by connecting rod and lever"—Yes, given the whole of the rest of the mechanism. Only in conjunction with that is it a brake-lever, and separated from its support it is not even a lever; it may be anything, or nothing."³⁶ "It is only in a language that I can mean something."³⁷ "[T]he meaning of a word is its use in the language."³⁸ "What looks as if it *had* to exist, is part of the language. It is a paradigm

in our language-game.”³⁹ “‘So you are saying that human agreement decides what is true and what is false.’—It is what human beings *say* that is true and false; and they agree in the *language* they use. That is not agreement in opinions but in form of life.”⁴⁰ “What has to be accepted, the given is—so one could say—*forms of life*.”⁴¹ These passages, among the most familiar in Wittgenstein’s work, clearly invoke notions of “wholes,” “gestalts,” or “forms” within which meaning occurs. But they are equally explicit in their rejection of the idea of an encompassing Whole or Experience, the glimmer or glimpse (however fleeting) of which gives this and that experience coherence and intelligibility.

Wittgenstein gave us distressingly little guidance as to just what he meant by “mechanisms,” “languages,” “language-games,” and “forms of life.” Does “language” mean French, German, or Japanese? Are “language-games” dialects, jargons, lingos, or slangs within such languages? Is a “form of life” a civilization, tradition, culture, society, or perhaps a practice such as law or medicine? Are “mechanisms” more or less distinctive and integrated conceptual systems such as one finds in engineering, football, and business management; or in theories such as quantum mechanics? These and numerous other speculations have been tried; but what seems certain is that these concepts stand for what Oakeshott calls abstractions or arrests, for partial (even more or less parochial) settings or contexts.

In the terms of this comparison, philosophy, as with all other thought and action, is and can only be concerned with particulars. Study of these particulars may support generalizations. If the studies are done by persons who are masters of more than one language or language-game, such generalizations may encompass or subsume particulars from more than one form or gestalt. But the idea of the whole or of Experience, and hence of reflection or discourse that is categorially different from and practically irrelevant to any particular mode of experience, is excluded. There neither is nor can be an entire chasm between philosophy and practice. Wittgenstein’s analyses of thinking, intending, and reading, of rules and rule-following, of seeing and of feeling pain, of joy and grief are analyses of those concepts as they are used in everyday activities of participants in language-games. Insofar as “postpositivist” political theorists are influenced by this Wittgensteinian understanding, their analyses of “power, justice, authority, [and] freedom” have this same character. Here again, then, we have a perspective from which Gunnell’s remark that these are “philosophical concepts for talking about politics and political ideas” is absurd.

As noted, however, Wittgenstein himself seemed to support Gunnell’s charge that philosophy is “impractical” in the sense of speaking about (not to) real, practically significant questions. “Philosophy” leaves everything as it is. It may “look as if we saw it as our task to reform language.”⁴² And

such "a reform for particular practical purposes, for example, an improvement in our terminology designed to prevent misunderstandings in practice, is perfectly possible. But these are not the cases we [as philosophers] have to do with. The confusions that occupy us arise when language is like an engine idling, not when it is doing work."⁴³ A related passage is perhaps more depressing (and yet confirming) from the point of view of Gunnell's despairing nostalgia for the heroic: "If one tried to advance *theses* in philosophy, it would never be possible to question them, because everyone would agree to them."⁴⁴

Taken by themselves and at face value, these remarks about the character and role of philosophy do suggest that Wittgenstein saw it, at most, as marginally and indirectly relevant to practical life. (Or even, as deep students of Wittgenstein such as Marcuse and Gellner have argued, as supportive of the *status quo* and hence politically and socially conservative.⁴⁵) Wittgensteinian philosophy is like a branch of medicine that restricts itself to the treatment of iatrogenic disease. One or another philosopher creates muddles and confusions, some of which may find their way into ordinary thought and practice. The Wittgensteinian enters the scene to clarify these muddles and returns matters to *status quo ante philosophicum*. For the most part, philosophy is self-referential and self-contained. Although philosophers analyze the concepts of everyday life, they argue with and correct one another. When philosophy does become involved with issues outside of its own confines, its sole objective is to purge ordinary practice of alien and unfortunate intrusions.

This account of Wittgenstein's views is incomplete and (at least in that sense) distorted. But before I explain why, let me make two brief points. First, we should recognize that not a little of what has gone on in the history of philosophy and political theory fits the picture just sketched. Aristotle corrected Plato; Hobbes denounced the errors of Aristotle; Locke improved upon Hobbes, and Rousseau on both; Marx turned Hegel on his head. No doubt these writers believed that they were discussing issues of moment beyond the pages of political theory. But it can hardly be denied that they occupied themselves extensively with internecine quarrels. Nor have historians and commentators neglected this aspect of political theory.⁴⁶

The second point is that these characteristics, even if exclusive, would not themselves render Wittgensteinian philosophy insignificant from what Gunnell regards as a practical point of view. However confined and narcissistic the self-understandings and intentions of its practitioners, such philosophizing occurs within culture and society. Both its confusions and its clarifications are likely to find their way outside the circles of philosophy—an eventuality made more likely by the fact that it concerns everyday concepts. In assessing the "relevance" of philosophy, one must remember

that no one can control the spread or effect of their reflections and formulations. Dismissive remarks about the "merely" philosophical and the "abstractly" academic betray insensitivity to the significance of language and thought in the most narrowly "practical" of activities. They also reveal naivete concerning processes of diffusion and transmission in even moderately integrated societies. One need not enlist in the company of Foucault to see difficulties with the almost romantic anti-intellectualism that creeps into Gunnell's remarks.

On my understanding of Wittgenstein, the immediately foregoing remarks are consonant with his views. His contention that philosophy leaves everything as it is must be understood by comparison not with simplistic distinctions between theory and practice or thought and action but with the soaring ambitions that inform his *Tractatus*. Every "sentence" in our language "is in order as it is"⁴⁷ (and hence can be left as it is) does not mean that no mistakes are made, that no confusions occur. It stands in contrast to the imagined ideal of a perfect order which, if only we could construct or discover it, would banish mistakes and confusions. We "are not *striving after* an ideal, as if . . . a perfect language awaited construction by us."⁴⁸ This may be enough to prove that Wittgenstein has given up Philosophy on the model of Gunnell's Political Theory.⁴⁹ But it is very far from proving that "he makes no contact" with practical life or that the confusions he seeks to eliminate are of "merely" philosophical consequence. We "lay down rules, a technique, . . . and . . . things do not turn out as we had assumed. . . . [We] are therefore as it were entangled in our own rules. This entanglement . . . is what we want to understand (i.e., to get a clear view of). . . . The civil status of a contradiction, or its status in civil life: there is the philosophical problem."⁵⁰

These disappointments, entanglements, and contradictions appear in many circumstances and numerous guises; and there is no once-and-for-all solution to them. "Problems are solved (difficulties eliminated), not a *single* problem." Accordingly, there "is not a philosophical method, though there are indeed methods, like different therapies."⁵¹ Wittgenstein himself was not optimistic about the response to or effects of the publication of his investigations. "It is not impossible that it should fall to the lot of this work, in its poverty and in the darkness of this time, to bring light into one brain or another—but, of course, it is not likely."⁵² But this agonized sentence, which could hardly have been written by someone who meant "leaves everything as it is" as superficial critics have read it, leaves no doubt that Wittgenstein took his work to be significant beyond the confines of philosophy. "The problems arising through a misinterpretation of our forms of language have the character of *depth*. They are deep disquietudes; their

roots are as deep in us as the forms of our language and their significance is as great as the importance of our language."⁵³

V

There is of course no easy inference from Wittgenstein to "postpositivist political philosophizing about politics." By this phrase, Gunnell seems to include some who are directly and positively influenced by Wittgenstein's thought, others only indirectly so, and yet others who ignore or reject his views. My most general reasons for taking up a few of Wittgenstein's theses are the same as for discussing Oakeshott, Marx, and Foucault. Despite Gunnell's animadversions against philosophy, his negative judgments and proscriptions concerning political theory depend directly on (largely implicit) assumptions he makes concerning philosophical questions. By outlining some explicit positions on these questions, I have hoped to clarify what is at issue and to delineate leading strategies of argument on a few of those issues. By itself, this does not discredit Gunnell's judgments on the substantive merits of recent work. Dealing in outlines, not details, I have had no ambition to demonstrate any such thing.

I do claim that these considerations raise serious doubts about the reasons actually given by Gunnell for his sweeping judgments. I further suggest that some of these considerations, particularly the ones from Wittgenstein, provide reasons for thinking that work of the kinds dismissed by Gunnell instead should be welcomed and encouraged as among the many different but complementary modes of doing political theory.

Gunnell's connected distinctions between talking about and speaking in or to politics and between "abstract" and "practical" performances are overdrawn and inappropriately deployed. Even in the deeply reflected and closely articulated form that related distinctions are presented by Oakeshott, they do not themselves warrant the uses Gunnell makes of them. If one were to reason from such distinctions to conclusions about the practical and the impractical (in Gunnell's sense of those terms), the most plausible intermediate propositions would be Pascalian-Platonic and would lead to the conclusion that the most "practical" reflections are the most "abstract" (i.e., what Oakeshott calls the most "concrete") and least "particular." Further, in addition to being at odds with his own passing remarks about language in relation to thought and action, Gunnell's assertion that contemporary political theorists deploy concepts that are merely "political," not political, must contend with Wittgenstein's powerful arguments that such distinctions are symptoms of a philosophical delusion.⁵⁴

This last consideration is a primary support for my more positive suggestion that the work dismissed by Gunnell is likely to make, has made, and is making valuable contributions to political theory. Wittgenstein's later philosophy presents a deep version of the view that questions about truth and falsity, validity and invalidity, justifiability and unjustifiability are secondary to questions of meaningfulness: we cannot ask whether a statement is true or false, a judgment right or wrong, unless it is meaningful to us. Philosophy of meaning or language is part of first philosophy. Wittgenstein was also a powerful exponent of the doctrine that meaning is "conventional," is in use, in practice, in language-games as they are "played" among us. His argument that philosophy must concern itself with the language of everyday is at bottom the argument that there is no meaning apart from language and no language other than that of our various practices and activities.

Accordingly, questions like "what is politics," "what is power," "what is freedom" can only be answered by examining, from "close to," the uses of "politics," "power," and the like in this or that form of life or language-game, practice, or activity. There are any number of these contexts of thought and action. For this reason, and because language is put to a "prodigious diversity"⁵⁵ and constantly changing array of uses, it is a misconception to think that all practitioners will speak in one voice or that examination of how they speak can be "complete" in the sense of all-encompassing or "once and for all" in the sense of permanently correct.

But language is public, that is, in principle shareable and in practice widely shared among participants in various practices and activities. Hence it is "open to the view"⁵⁶ not only of participants but of analysts who trouble to acquaint themselves with it. No suprasensible realities need be apprehended; no substrata need be unearthed. If diversity, complexity, and change all but guarantee variation and controversy among both practitioners and theorists, the public character of language allows dialogue and argumentation. Thereby, it allows substantial though not necessarily entire consensus, as opposed to mutual incomprehension and raw conflict. There are issues to be addressed, clarified, and provisionally resolved; and there is the wherewithal for attempting these things. In language-games that have "power" and "authority," "law" and "justice," "classes" and "conflicts," and the notion of "politics" as an activity concerned with these, there are politics for the political theorist to analyze, reflect about, and (if of such a bent) otherwise to participate in. And there are resources at the disposal of those inclined to and capable of these distinctive and demanding activities. These views, in much more subtle and variegated forms than the foregoing sketch conveys, have been influential with a large number of persons

interested in politics and morals. And their influence can be discerned in extensive and vigorous activity and a substantial literature.

Gunnell does not confront these assumptions or this literature in any detail. His objections are distant and (as I have tried to show) otherwise unsatisfactory. His chief complaint is presented as an invidious comparison with other sets of assumptions and another, earlier literature. Insofar as I can recognize political theorists and theories of my acquaintance in his historical sketch, I see no reason to deny their importance and their claim to close, continuing attention. In the absence of arguments or evidence that refutes or discredits specified features of the more recent work disparaged by Gunnell, his comparisons carry no criticisms of it. Unfortunately, students familiar with political theory from implicitly essentialist books such as Gunnell's are in no position to appreciate this fact.

VI

Allow me the liberty of concluding these remarks on a more personal note. Reading Gunnell's book reminded me forcefully of the state of political theory, at least in political science departments in the United States, when I began to study it in the 1950s. We read heavily in "histories" (the quotation marks commit an anachronism) of political theory such as Sabine's, in the works of the most canonical of the great writers, and in compilations such as Ebenstein's that provided further selections from (the political parts of) the tradition. There was a strong tendency to celebrate these figures and their works, especially by comparison with contemporary empirical and scientific students of politics and their productions. But there was also a certain defensiveness, especially against the charge that our studies were "merely historical." This charge took force from the fact that few of us would have been so bold—or so blasphemous—as actually to have attempted inquiries of the kinds carried out by our heroes from the past. Our task—perhaps humble in itself but elevated by its subject matter—was to "keep alive" the memory of great work by teaching and writing about it.

In retrospect, that is, viewing those times as they now appear (to me), these features should occasion neither apology nor surprise. On the one hand, we were correct in thinking that the books we studied are works of astonishing richness and power. It simply was true that our colleagues in political science would have benefitted from examining them. On the other hand, we were stopped short of work other than exegesis and commentary by much more than a penchant for antiquarianism or hero worship. We were, I think, somewhat bedazzled; our gazes were directed

too exclusively at the Giant stars of our firmament. But more important was the dominance, of which we were more or less aware, of doctrines such as logical positivism, emotivism, and behaviorism. The champions of these views, not a notably diffident lot, gave what they aggressively insisted were conclusive *arguments* that political theory as we understood it was archaic, outmoded by advances in philosophy and social science. More insidiously, unbeknownst to at least some of us, these same philosophical doctrines had worked their influence on some of the "historians" of political theory on whom we relied. It was intimated that not a few of the writings we admired, however magnificent by certain criteria, were themselves confused, philosophically outmoded, and hence worthy of historical study but not of imitation. Thus a cluster of considerations combined to convince many of us that what was best for us to do was all that could or should be done. Ideas to this effect were less well-considered and cogent than we believed, and their combination was not notably coherent. But we were not well-positioned to argue to the contrary.

It is an exaggeration, but not worse, to say that Gunnell would return us to this situation. He revives the idea that political theorists should "keep alive" the memory of the great theorists of the past, he dismisses predictably insignificant efforts at other kinds of work in the field, and he echoes an antagonism toward "philosophy" that is strongly reminiscent of the views of at least some of the "mythologists" who preceded him in making similar prescriptions.

Gunnell does claim that his proposals differ from those of Strauss, Voegelin, Arendt, and Wolin; but as several critics point out, by the end of his book the distinctions he draws do not mark any very substantial differences. Still, there are implicit differences between Strauss *et al.* and Gunnell. For present purposes, the most important of these are signalled by his endorsement of Pocock's conception of historical study.

The point, of course, is not to give up historical studies; Pocock could hardly be accused of any such recommendation. Nor is it somehow to cut Plato and Machiavelli, Hobbes, and Rousseau down to size. The long-standing judgment that these are thinkers of exceptional profundity and subtlety has always been implicitly by comparison with lesser writers; detailing similarities and differences can only enhance our appreciation of them.

Gunnell's endorsement of Pocock's work, then, is in no way inconsistent with his preference for historical studies. Pocock's influence has been to heighten interest in the history of political thought and, in my judgment, to improve the quality of work concerning it. But Gunnell's endorsement of it does carry implications strongly counter to his major recommendations. The most obvious point is that Pocockian studies, though

not diminishing the stature of Gunnell's Political Theorists, will enliven our sense that reflection about politics has been and might again be significant even if it does not attain to the heights achieved by a few men of genius. It may encourage the thought that contributive political theory need not await the rare and happenstance conjunction of towering genius and fascination with politics.

In my judgment, however, the most important element implicit in Gunnell's endorsement of Pocock's work concerns not the broadening of subject matter that it effects but what I will presume to call the philosophical character of Pocock's studies. The most obvious respect in which those studies have such a character is that Pocock (as well as a number of others who have enlivened and improved the study of the history of political thought) has been attentive to and influenced by recent philosophical work outside of historiography and political theory, especially work in the philosophy of language and of science and social science. Speech act theory and Kuhnian notions of paradigms and processes of paradigmatic change play a prominent role in his work. More important, Pocock's work is philosophical in the wider and more fundamental sense that it is self-conscious and self-critical concerning the assumptions from which it proceeds and the objectives which it pursues. His views are much debated because they are eminently *debateable*, because he has articulated and defended them in the detail that shows them to be responsive to alternate views and that allows others to formulate pertinent, cogent responses to them. In these respects, the difference between his work and the historical studies that I alluded to above and that Gunnell discusses is enormous.

Strikingly, the work of Pocock and others who have had so marked an influence on historical studies has largely coincided with other developments in the field that display these same philosophical characteristics. The nonhistorical, "postpositivist" philosophizing about politics which Gunnell laments has been influenced by (among others) the same philosophical positions which Pocock has found valuable. And the best of it is self-conscious and self-critical in ways analogous to his. It is also striking that the historical and nonhistorical modes of study have proven to be strongly complementary. Some scholars and theorists have contributed importantly to both modes; work of the one kind is accessible and strongly of interest to those primarily working in the other; organizations, conferences, and journals regularly and readily mix the two. No single consideration will explain these facts. But interest in and detailed familiarity with the works of Austin and Searle, Popper and Kuhn, Wittgenstein and Quine is now widely shared among political theorists and contributes importantly to a sense of commonality and to the belief that mutually beneficial exchange

is possible. Most importantly, there is mutual recognition of standards of argumentation and a sense of knowing not only what is going on but why.

Of course, all this means that political theorists are indulging in quite a lot of "abstract" philosophizing and "talking about" their work and their subject matters, activities that Gunnell implicitly endorses in praising Pocock's work but which he programmatically laments and seeks to banish. In the body of this essay, I have tried to indicate some of the general difficulties that attend his proposal. In the perspective from which I have permitted myself to write these concluding paragraphs, that proposal presents itself as straightforwardly reactionary.

Notes

1. MMST, 54.
2. PT, 148.
3. MMST, 40. It is well to remember that Gunnell is himself an academic whose publications—including those under discussion here—bear a tolerable resemblance to his own characterizations of the modes of academic philosophy (*e.g.*, *PSPI*) and academic history (*e.g.*, *PPhT*). There is thus *self-deprecation* in his schema and arguments. I try to bear this in mind as I respond to Gunnell's sometimes unflattering remarks about the efforts of his contemporaries in departments of history, philosophy, and political science.
4. PT, 148, 151.
5. PT, 145.
6. PT, 143.
7. I at least am grateful to Gunnell for sparing us his corresponding list of characteristics of academic philosophers and historians.
8. PT, 147.
9. PT, 157.
10. Gunnell extends his unfavorable comparisons to such figures as Socrates, Seneca, and More. Ambivalently, he extends them to what seem on his view to be the closest thing to Political Theorists among us, the "mythologists" Strauss, Voegelin, Arendt, and Wolin. Although more "political" than mere academic philosophers and historians, Socrates, Seneca, and More were no more than "political thinkers" and "critics" (PT, 148, 149). They "recoil from . . . the extraordinary action contemplated by the [T]heorist," would be frightened or embarrassed by the "demiurgic vision" of the latter, and "resign" themselves to martyrdom rather than offer a truly radical challenge to political society. (Does this present Socrates as, finally, a timorous man?) I frankly do not understand Gunnell's attitude toward his

"mythologists." His complaint that they have propounded myths seems to put them in what by Gunnell's standards is the best of company.

11. Sheldon S. Wolin, *Hobbes and the Epic Tradition of Political Theory*, Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1970

12. See: Hannah Arendt, *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*, Ronald Beiner, ed., Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1982, especially 21-22.

13. *Ibid.*, 22.

14. *Ibid.*

15. Michael Oakeshott, *Experience and Its Modes*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1933, chapters 1 and 2, and *passim*.

16. Oakeshott's understanding of the differences between philosophy and theory can be examined by comparing the second chapter and conclusion of *Experience and Its Modes* with the first essay in *On Human Conduct*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1975. It may be that the latter makes an opening for theory to play a small role in practice.

17. Gunnell uses a passage from Oakeshott as the epigraph to the chapter in which he attacks Strauss and company for concocting a myth about the history of Political Theory. Oakeshott's argument is far more severe and far-reaching, however, than anything in Gunnell's criticism of mythmaking. That Gunnell has not seriously considered Oakeshott's position is indicated in several ways, one of the most telegraphic yet telling of which is the fact that the epigraph with which he opens *Political Theory* is Nietzsche's aphorism: "Theory and Practice—Fateful Distinction . . ."

18. Oakeshott, *On Human Conduct*, 26, 30-31.

19. As we will have occasions to see, this is not the only respect in which Gunnell's effort to rebuild the walls between philosophy and political theory (the dismantling of which has been one of the most encouraging and fruitful developments in the last two decades) results primarily in ill-considered philosophizing.

20. MMST, 45.

21. MMST, 52. Gunnell attributes these views to Hans-Georg Gadamer and, I think, Michel Foucault.

22. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, G.E.M. Anscombe, trans., New York, Macmillan, 1953, part II, xi, 224.

23. Gunnell's objections that Pocock offers us a theory of interpretation, not a method of historical study, and that Pocock has not adequately practiced what he preaches are relevant here only in that the first of these makes palpable another one of the ways in which his views about Political Theory depend directly on a philosophical position.

24. MMST, 54.

25. MMST, 55. If he chooses, my colleague John Pocock will continue to speak eloquently for himself. By intruding my capital letters into Gunnell's text, I indicate my own judgment that his attempt at a rapprochement with Pocock's position ends in failure.

26. J.G.A. Pocock, "Political Theory, History, and Myth: A Salute to John Gunnell," *Annals of Scholarship*, 1, 4, Fall, 1981, 3-25, on 13.

27. MMST, 54-55. Gunnell's categorizations are sometimes startling. From anything like close up, the differences between, say, Rawls and the work of conceptual analysts of the British tradition—leading doctrines of which Rawls explicitly disavows (cf. *A Theory of Justice*, Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1971, especially section 9) are at least as striking as those between Arendt and Wolin. Gunnell admits that these materials "range widely" and are "diverse," but he nevertheless lumps them together and tars the whole lump with the same brush.

28. Gunnell's use of "talk about" is roughly that familiar to us from the idea we have of the weather: we talk about it a lot because we cannot do anything about it.

29. PT, 134.

30. From Foucault's perspective, if I understand it, matters are even worse than I have stated them. All language and hence all thought and action are political in the fundamental sense that they concern and affect the distribution and use of power. Thus Gunnell's characterization of self-designated, contemporary political theorists as merely "political," as doing no more than "talking about" politics, is at once an impossibility, an indication of Gunnell's naivete at the conscious level, and a deeply if not self-consciously political move on his part.

31. Cf. Judith N. Shklar, "Review," *Political Theory*, 6, 4, November, 1978, 558-561.

32. PT, 160-161.

33. This speculation might be extended as follows: Gunnell's celebration of Plato and other Political Theorists is an expression of nostalgia for what he regards as heroic ages of the past. And his love-hate relationship with Strauss, Voegelin, Arendt, and Wolin—nostalgic antimodernists all—is a function of his own puzzlement as to how these moderns have managed at least to stretch somewhat the bonds of the modern societies they inhabit.

34. MMST, 55.

35. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*. 124.

36. *Ibid.*, 6.

37. *Ibid.*, 18.

38. *Ibid.*, 43.

39. *Ibid.*, 50.

40. *Ibid.*, 241.

41. *Ibid.*, II, xi, 226.
42. *Ibid.*, 132.
43. *Ibid.*
44. *Ibid.*, 128.
45. Cf. Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, Boston, Beacon Press, 1964, especially 173ff; Ernest Gellner, *Words and Things*, Boston, Beacon Press, 1959; Gellner, *Thought and Change*, London, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1964, 83ff, 182ff.
46. On the evidence of his *Political Theory*, Gunnell is not averse to or well-placed to bring objections against these tendencies. Much of his book is devoted to dispelling myths and confusions; but the confusions he takes up are not within politics, Political Theory, or even the works of commentators on Political Theory. His concern, rather, is largely with muddles and misunderstandings perpetrated by writings about what Political Theory is and how we should go about studying it. If Wittgensteinian philosophizing is at a remove from its proper subject matters, substantial stretches of Gunnell's book are at two or even three removes from politics.
47. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 98.
48. *Ibid.*
49. But then we have to confront Wittgenstein's many *arguments* against Philosophy on the heroic model.
50. *Ibid.*, 125.
51. *Ibid.*, 133.
52. *Ibid.*, II, x.
53. *Ibid.*, 111.
54. This contention must confront two further facts. The first is that many of the theorists dismissed by Gunnell follow, at least in part, the Wittgensteinian program of attending to the language of everyday and are strenuous in their efforts to show—for instance, by their use of examples—that they are doing so. Of course, they may be unsuccessful and fall victim to the very delusions Wittgenstein labored to expose. Once again, however, this would have to be shown, case by case, instance by instance. (Note that the exertions of these writers frequently elicit a different charge against them, namely that they are mired in the homely, the mundane, the trivial, and never ascend to the philosophical heights appropriate to political theory. Echoes of this complaint can also be heard in Gunnell's remarks.) Second, Gunnell's examples of merely "political" concepts are implausible on their face. Keeping in mind the points made above, it is difficult in the extreme to understand how arguments about power, authority, justice, and freedom could be styled merely "political." Gunnell's assertion in this regard makes sense to me only as an expression of the view that there is no genuine politics in our societies. But if this is what

Gunnell thinks, it is imperative that he deal with the view that these writers are deeply, if unconsciously, political in that their work has the effect, if not the intention, of maintaining our societies in an apolitical condition.

55. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, II, xi, 224.

56. *Ibid.*, 126.

CHAPTER VII

Remembrance of Times Lost: On the Recoverability of Political Traditions

RUSSELL L. HANSON

He has two antagonists: the first presses him from behind, from the origin. The second blocks the road ahead. He gives battle to both. To be sure, the first supports him in his fight with the second, for he wants to push him forward, and in the same way the second supports him in his fight with the first, since he drives him back. But it is only theoretically so. For it is not only the two antagonists who are there, but he himself as well, and who really knows his intentions? His dream, though, is that some time in an unguarded moment—and this would require a night darker than any night has ever been yet—he will jump out of the fighting line and be promoted, on account of his experience in fighting, to the position of umpire over his antagonists in their fight with each other.

—Franz Kafka, *Notes from the Year 1920*

I

In many American departments of political science, political theorists are strangers in a strange land. They speak a language that is unfamiliar to their colleagues in other areas of the discipline; and even when they do manage to make themselves understood, their message is often regarded as unimportant or uninteresting, except maybe to other political theorists. Under these circumstance, it will come as no surprise to them that one of their own, John Gunnell, has recently described the condition of contemporary political theory as one of profound alienation. What may puzzle some political theorists, however, is Gunnell's prescription for overcoming this alienation.¹

Gunnell contends that this alienation is due in part to political theorists' willingness to consider epistemological issues independently of, and in fact prior to, substantive theoretical concerns.² Against this tendency,

Gunnell argues that we must *begin* with political theories—and proceed to metatheoretical considerations only in the course of justifying claims made by those theories. We cannot start with metatheory, hoping to establish the proper foundations for theories of politics, for the simple reason that epistemological questions will never be settled finally—and so we will never get around to the business of constructing substantive theories of politics. Hence, we ought to stop talking about doing theory and actually start doing it, if our alienation is to be lessened.

Gunnell's notion of the sort of substantive political theory that we ought to be doing, however, is rather restrictive. For example, it does not include the kind of political theory practiced by the "great thinkers," who were explicitly concerned with remaking the world according to some notion of the good society. Gunnell rejects this heroic vision of political theory, as well as more prosaic varieties of instrumentalist theories: e.g., those associated with the so-called policy sciences. Instead, he believes that we ought to immerse ourselves in contemporary theories of action and symbolic interpretation as a prolegomenon to any future efforts to "identify, describe, categorize, explain, evaluate and even prescribe actions."³

I disagree with Gunnell's recommendations on this score. Briefly, I argue that Gunnell's abandonment of "subversive" political theories in favor of action philosophies is inconsistent, because an adequate theory of symbolic action is *necessarily* subversive. Insofar as action is construed in conventional terms, the possibility of alternate conventions—and hence of alternate worlds of action—must be entertained (and not merely as an afterthought). The very idea of *conventional* action includes this possibility, and any adequate prolegomena must take this into account from the start. Once it does, the question of subversion is necessarily raised; and then the role of political theory in activities that subvert conventions in the name of other, "better" conventions demands our attention.

Hence, in what follows, I review Gunnell's critique of heroic political theory and his subsequent advocacy of symbolic interpretation, which I show is fundamentally inadequate for doing political theory. Next, I develop an alternate approach to the problem of action. This draws heavily on the philosophical hermeneutics of Hans-Georg Gadamer, in which the concept of historical tradition plays a central role. I then turn to the efforts of Jürgen Habermas to establish a vantage point from which traditions may be criticized, i.e., subverted. Finally, I present a version of "critical hermeneutics" that retains the political edge of subversive theory, while building upon action theory itself.

The advantage of proceeding this way, I conclude, is that it offers a way of seeing both the limits on and the possibilities for political action. In this way, it *contributes to political action*. That is, it provides a way for

theory to become a "material force in the world," as Karl Marx urged, establishing *political* theory on a substantive basis.

II

Gunnell's best-known treatment of traditional political theory and its shortcomings is *Political Theory: Tradition and Interpretation*. This is easily his most provocative assessment of the state of political theory in general and the history of political theory in particular.

It is also a rather puzzling work. On the one hand, Gunnell's version of the history of political thought portrays the "great thinkers" as master illusionists whose visions of new and better societies tended to subvert reflective political action *per se*, not just those practices that political theorists confronted in their own societies and found wanting. The decline, or at least the impotence, of this profoundly antipolitical activity in the open society is clearly not something that Gunnell mourns. On the other hand, he claims to be interested in trying to "reawaken a sense of the possibility, or at least the ideal, of a creative ordering or reconstitution of social life."⁴ The purpose of doing the history of political thought as he construes it is to remind us of this ideal—but not, as it turns out, to encourage us to do this sort of political theory.

That is, this reminder is not an invitation to subversive or heroic theory at all. It is rather a reminder of the delusionary quality of heroic theory, and it is a warning against doing *that* kind of substantive political theory. Gunnell's "heroes" are, after all, tragic figures in the story of political theory. As such, their fate is to struggle against fate, in the awareness that this struggle can only end in defeat. The fate of subversive political theorists is to struggle with a haunting recognition that the vision of political theory can never be finally and completely realized. The remaking of the world is never done, and so the project of political theory remains essentially incomplete. No wonder, then, that Gunnell considers the great thinkers "mad"—their pursuit of that which they knew they could not achieve was unreasonable.

This tragic portrayal of political theory has a didactic purpose. By presenting the great thinkers in this way, Gunnell wants to teach us about the true flaw of their characters, which is not so much madness as it is *hubris*. The tragic history of political theory is supposed to remind us that past political thinkers wanted "to see into the future, to threaten society with disaster, to proclaim not only that institutional arrangements were in some way wrong but that what seemed as real to every man as the furniture of the world, including his vision of himself, was in fact an illusion."⁵

Presumably, this reminder will cause us to restrain ourselves from trying to change the world, at least until we understand it better, at which point we may realize the "boldness and arrogance of subversive activity."

Thus the kind of political theory which Gunnell wants to make possible by telling the story of political theory in this way is a much more sober, and much less tragic, enterprise. It is a political theory without *hubris*, a political theory without madness, a political theory without vision. It is an academic political theory.⁶

That this is Gunnell's message is evident in his subsequent endorsement of action theory. As Ira Strauber demonstrates in another of this volume's essays, the underlaborer conception of political philosophy that informs Gunnell's approach is quite conservative.⁷ This is because the type of action theory advocated by Gunnell is rooted in a "subtle positivism" that takes the phenomenon of action itself as unproblematic. It does so by treating the phenomenal object of analysis, namely action, as something given, albeit in a way that requires explanation.

Gunnell rightly argues that the social sciences differ from the natural sciences insofar as the "facts" under investigation by social sciences are conventional. They consist of actors' conceptions of the world and their place in it.⁸ Consequently, symbolic or interpretive analysis must *at some point* refer to a conventional universe that is "preconstituted" or "given," whereas natural-scientific analysis refers to "facts" that are, strictly speaking, theoretical constructions.

Gunnell is impressed by the fact that action occurs in a field of meaning that is constituted or given prior to analysis, and his symbolic interpretation tries to accommodate this phenomenon without denying the possibility of an autonomous *theory* of action. Unfortunately, the actions by which this field of meaning is itself constituted are thereby ignored. The act of constitution is overshadowed or even eclipsed by its factuality, as understood by a "subtle postitivism."⁹

Hence in Gunnell's account, actors do not *create* meaning. They merely act out the meaning already present in society. Consequently, meaning is given to actors, and our job as political theorists is simply to understand which particular meanings ought to be assigned to actions that take place under a specified set of circumstances.

Neither actions nor their background of meaning can be taken for granted, however. Gunnell recognizes that this is true of action, but he does not see that the background of meaning is as much a part of the phenomenal field as are the actions that take place in the foreground. His scheme permits people only to *act* meaningfully, not *act meaningfully*. Therefore, the field of action is unnecessarily (and arbitrarily) narrowed.

This is the fundamental weakness of Gunnell's version of action theory. Because it focuses exclusively on the interpretation of actions that unfold against a background of meaning which is already constituted, and so "given," this action theory excludes a class of actions that are centrally important for political theory. These actions have to do with the production, reproduction, and especially the reconstitution of the symbolic universes within which routine actions take place. Such actions must be included in any theory of action that purports to show how political theory may be grounded in the politics of everyday life, overcoming its alienation.

A proper understanding of actions and their significance involves much more than interpreting specific actions with reference to the social context in which they unfold. It also entails placing social contexts themselves in context, as it were. In particular, these contexts must be seen as historical constructions, since it is in history that they are produced and, if they are durable, reproduced. Consequently, the meaning of actions can be made intelligible only by relating actions to conventions, even as we embed those conventions in some account of their history.¹⁰

To do this, a conception of tradition is necessary. Just as actions must be referred to conventions, so must conventions be referred to traditions in order to illuminate their meaning and significance. Moreover, the traditions to which conventions must be referred are not simply analytical constructions. They are practical creations that are established in the course of social interaction. As such, they have a historical existence independent of any theoretical designation.

Precisely because traditions are historical, however, their persistence is always problematic. They and the conventions that embody them must be acted and reenacted, or else they will cease to exist. This, of course, is what makes subversive political theory possible, insofar as it aims to break with tradition and establish new patterns of action by unmasking the conventional aspect of tradition. In other words, subversive political theory seeks to exploit the historical character of meaning and action. Since both are human creations, their persistence is problematic; or rather their persistence can be *made* problematic by revealing them as human creations, and so subject to human re-creation.

From this perspective, then, action theory must be subversive, to the extent that it conceives action in conventional, i.e. historical, terms. Properly understood, action theory is a theory of action that is at one and the same time an action with practical consequences for the way in which we conceive the world and our places in it. Action theory is subversive because it is a material force in the world, and it is a material force in the world because it is subversive. The real issue is whether action theory can lead to the

creation of new meanings (and, hence, new action possibilities); and, if so, under what conditions.

III

We cannot escape the problem that haunted the great thinkers: the problem of "putting theory into practice." Action theory does not, *pace* Gunnell, extract us from this problem by deferring the remaking of the world until we have gained an understanding of it. If anything, action theory makes the problem even more pressing, because it presumes from the very start that action is conventional, and therefore subject to change. Whether we intend it or not, this revelation subverts existing patterns of meaningful action by denying their naturalness or inevitability. In that sense, the very idea of social action is subversive.

Action theory is, therefore, "always already" a material force in history. The question, as Marx would say, is whether it can become a material force *for* history by stimulating action oriented toward "making history." In the rest of this essay, I explore the way in which an action theory that incorporates a notion of historical traditions might become such a force.

This explains why I chose "Remembrance of Things Past" as a title. My real interest is in the future and the way in which the remembrance of times past can inspire and inform action oriented toward the transformation of society. Hence I am primarily concerned with the relationship between remembrance and liberation, especially as they are united in political actions that make history.¹¹

The claim I advance and defend may be summarized succinctly: those who would make their own history must understand it as well. They must remember the past in order to repudiate the present in the name of the future. Only in this way can history be truly made.

By this, I do not mean simply that historical knowledge is a useful weapon in the arsenal of revolution, although that may be true. Rather, my argument is that the future is only conceivable in light of the past and, conversely, that the past is only intelligible in light of the future. Between past and future, there exists an essential continuity that is forged in the present by those who struggle against past and future and, in so doing, participate in the making of history.

Hence when I speak of the recoverability of political traditions, I am referring to the recovery of history, not as something that lies only in the past, but as something that lies in the future as well. Political traditions stretch from the past into the future, and their recovery in the present is simultaneously a remembrance of things past and a retrieval of future

possibilities. The recovery of traditions restores the possibility of liberation as present action oriented toward the future.

In order to substantiate this claim, I review the debate between Gadamer and Habermas over the possibility of a critical hermeneutics.¹² The main issue in this debate is the way in which we understand the present. For Gadamer, the present must be understood primarily with reference to its past, since the very categories with which we approach the present (or the future, for that matter) are themselves conditioned by the past. Habermas, on the other hand, argues that this concedes too much to authority of the past over the present and that we must anticipate the future in order to realize the latent possibilities of the present. Thus, the standpoint from which we understand the present and its possibilities for liberation is in question throughout this exchange.

After presenting the debate in somewhat stylized form, I propose a reconciliation of these two points of view. In essence, I argue that both past and future perspectives on the present are necessary in order to grasp our situation and act upon it. I suggest that such a synthesis depends on locating the present in a narrative framework that tells the story of a tradition as it unfolds in the lives of those whose actions embody it. These actions are "always already" bound by tradition, and so reflect the authority of the past over the present. At the same time, these actions extend the life of traditions and move the story forward. When actions become future-oriented, they form an explicit part of the "story of a tradition." in other words, when the future becomes the motivating force behind the actions of those who are the bearers of tradition, liberating episodes in history become possible.

This liberation from the past is not, nor can it be, an escape from tradition. We cannot "jump out of the fighting line and be promoted to the position of umpire over history." That would indeed require a night darker than any that has ever been yet. Liberation only shifts the battle line forward, adding more episodes to our story, which has no end that is not also an end for us.

IV

The concept of tradition refers to the relationship between past and present. "Tradition," from the Latin root word *tradere* meaning to hand over or deliver.¹³ It is usually understood as the handing down of certain practices from one generation to another, often with connotations of respect from tradition and its authority. The liberal tradition, for example, is a particular way of conducting politics that has been passed down from

generation to generation of citizens in Anglo-Saxon countries and their colonies. Like other political traditions, the liberal tradition binds generations to one another, overcoming (at least partially) their separation in time. It is a source of continuity in the history of certain political communities.

However, the persistence of traditions depends as much on the taking up of practices in question by their heirs as it does upon the bequest by their forebearers. Unless the handing down of traditions is met with an embrace by subsequent generations, traditions will surely die. The reception of a political tradition by the members of a political community is therefore a remembrance of things past. This act of remembrance recalls, calls to mind again, the past in its relationship to the present. It recollects the meaning of a tradition for the members of the present generation of a political community. Hence the remembrance of things past renews the membership of a current generation in the tradition of which it is a part.

Thus, remembrance is the process by which a political community *identifies* itself in relation to its past. Remembrance is the recollection of *our* past, of a past which we make ours in some way. For that reason, we do not seek to understand the past as past, but only in relation to the present. We strive to see the past in the present, so to speak; and on the basis of that partial identification, we try to understand the significance of the past for the present.

This "fusion of horizons," to use Gadamer's terminology, is something that we *must* seek, if we are to understand at all. It is necessary for us to answer the call for understanding in order to understand.¹⁴ The call itself arises out of the fact that meaning is never simply "given" to us. Its existence is in some sense always problematic, because our present situation, though affected by the past, is never identical to it. To the extent that our present situation differs from the past, the relevance of past interpretations or meanings is not and cannot be presumed. It must be made apparent by the search for understanding, which strives to overcome the nonidentity of past and present on the basis of their *partial* identity, *i.e.*, the "presence" of the past in the present. Consequently, interpretation is action oriented toward reaching an understanding, and it is the practice in which meaning itself is constituted.

What is true of contemporary interpretations is also true of all past interpretations. They, too, represent efforts of past generations to place *their* past in intelligible relation to *their* present. A tradition is, therefore, a continuous process of showing the relevance of the past to the present. It is a never-ending effort to make sense out of that which is necessarily puzzling but which can be resolved in the act of interpretation itself.

V

As each generation returns time and again to its past and recognizes it as such, the past is extended into the present. By the very act of interpreting its past in relation to its present situation, a generation enters "into the happening of a tradition in which past and present are constantly mediated."¹⁵ Hence, traditions are reproduced by efforts to understand their meaning in circumstances that have changed and rendered their significance unclear or problematic.

This means that historical understanding does not involve "going back in time" so that somehow people from the present are able to experience life as did those about whom history is written. Historical understanding is not, and cannot be, achieved via "objective" methods of interpretation that allow us to understand past events in the same way that those who lived those events did. That kind of hermeneutics is literally impossible, because it disregards the way in which the past influences the present and so *allows* us access to the past.

Precisely because history is *effective* history, an understanding of the past from the standpoint of the present is possible.¹⁶ History is not simply an archive or repository or human artifacts that may become the object of interpretation. History acts on the present from a distance, as it were, by virtue of the way in which it constitutes the present. The past is "present" in our understanding of the present because "our consciousness is determined by a real historical process, in such a way that we are not free to juxtapose ourselves to the past." Hence, "we must always become conscious afresh of the action which is thereby exercised over us, in such a way that everything past which we come to experience compels us to take hold of it completely, to assume in some way its truth."¹⁷

Because the past is present, we gain access to it insofar (and only insofar) as we become conscious of the effectiveness of history. We become aware of the past and understand its meaning for us when we become conscious of the impact of the past on the present and our understanding of the present. That impact is objectively mediated by the chain of preceding interpretations by which past events and their significance are transmitted to us in the present and so affect our understanding of them. When we reflect on this "sedimentation" of meaning, we are reflecting on the historical conditions of our present understanding of the past, so that the effectiveness of history is revealed to us.

The return to the past entailed by remembrance is therefore a return *from* the present. Moreover, remembrance culminates in a return to the present by way of the past that is contained therein. Historical understanding is achieved in this "eternal re-turning" in time, by which we overcome

the temporal separation of past and present. In the so-called hermeneutic circle, the horizons of past and present are fused, and understanding is reached.

This process of mediation in which traditions are reconstituted also explains the remarkable fecundity of traditions. Since interpretation involves a "fusion of horizons," it necessarily produces meaning. Interpretation does not simply convey meanings from the past; it creates meaning by establishing the significance of the past for the present. But the present is not the end of time; it is only a point in time. The present is always becoming past, and the future is always becoming present. This means that new interpretations are always possible and, indeed, necessary for the survival of traditions. Thus, the recovery of traditions is a continuous process. Because our present vantage point, from which we interpret the past, is historically situated, both our vantage point and that which it overlooks are constantly unfolding before us.

Hence our understanding of the past and its significance for the present must be continuously revised and reinterpreted. The process of revision and reinterpretation is, therefore, an essential aspect of living history. This, as Habermas observes, is Gadamer's real achievement: the rehabilitation of the concept of a tradition that is unavoidably transmitted from generation to generation.¹⁸ Each generation necessarily appropriates the meaning of the past in reference to its current situation, and in so doing extends or renews the tradition of which it is a part.

The fact that we share a language with those in our past ensures that we can understand the past in its relation to the present by working through that language. The past speaks to us in a language that we can understand if we open ourselves to the question which animates the past, as Heidegger would put it. The participation in language that binds generations to one another establishes traditions *on an objective basis*, since it is in language that we live and become conscious of our being in the world of language. Language is, therefore, the medium of history.

This point must be emphasized. Language is for Gadamer constitutive of human being. It is not merely a *distinctive* feature of human life, it is a *defining* feature of it. Language defines us in an active way:

In all our knowledge of ourselves and in all knowledge of the world, we are *always already* encompassed by the language that is our own. We grow up, and we become acquainted with men and in the last analysis with ourselves when we learn to speak. Learning to speak does not mean learning to use a preexistent tool for designating a world already somehow familiar to us; it means acquiring a familiarity and acquaintance with the world itself and how it confronts us.¹⁹

The relationship between "effective history" and language should be obvious. We are affected by language, not in accidental ways, but in a fundamental manner. To learn a language is to grant the authority of the past over the present, insofar as what we learn is the past in the present. This authority can never be completely repudiated without losing our identity. Even so, we can become conscious of effective history by becoming aware that we are "always already" encompassed in language.

In that sense, there is no escape from language, only the recognition of its unavoidable presence. Correspondingly, there is no escape from tradition. To be is to be in a language that has been, and is to reproduce and extend that language in encounters with the "world." Being is becoming in language.

VI

Traditions that link generations also bind them. That is, the *authority* of tradition over the present makes criticizing or even repudiating that tradition impossible, since it is only on the basis of tradition that we understand at all. We may become conscious of the effectiveness of history, but even the knowledge that our understanding of the past is grounded in a present that is itself the product of past understandings is not enough to free us from the influence of traditional ways of understanding. As Habermas says, Gadamer's hermeneutics "bangs helplessly, so to speak, from within against the walls of tradition."²⁰ The finitude of the hermeneutic situation cannot be transcended.²¹

For Habermas, that is not enough, because hermeneutics can only recognize the partiality of its understanding, without being able to criticize that partiality. That would require "a reference system that goes beyond the framework of tradition as such; only then can tradition also be criticized."²² Only from a vantage point outside of tradition can tradition *per se* be appropriated in its totality.

Such a vantage point is needed in order to "complete" our understanding of the present in light of the past because the language of tradition is not a neutral medium. Traditional meanings appear to be authoritative because the grounds for their authority or legitimacy cannot be questioned. These grounds remain submerged, and hence unexamined, because the process of interpretation is systematically distorted by relations of power. These relations of power incorporate a mobilization of bias into language itself, thereby precluding any genuine understanding of a situation by the actors involved. Hence, the "authority" of tradition is in actuality a mask behind which domination conceals itself, so that the appropriation of a

tradition *tout court* requires that we comprehend its ideological aspect in order to understand its relevance to the present.

Habermas's point is this:

It makes good sense to conceive of language as a kind of metainstitution on which all social institutions are dependent; for social action is constituted only in ordinary language communication. But this metainstitution of language as tradition is evidently dependent in turn on social processes that are not reducible to normative relationships. Language is *also* a medium of domination and social power; it serves to legitimate relations of organized force. Insofar as the legitimations do not articulate the power relations whose institutionalization they make possible, insofar as these relations merely manifest themselves in the legitimations, language is *also* ideological. Here it is a question not of deceptions within a language but of deception with language as such. Hermeneutic experience that encounters this dependency of the symbolic framework on actual conditions turns into critique of ideology.²³

Whence can the critique of the ideological aspect of tradition be launched, and on what is it founded, if not tradition itself? What is the reference system that goes beyond the framework of tradition and permits us to appropriate the meaning of tradition in its totality?

According to Habermas, a critical vantage point can only be secured in a "philosophy of history with a practical intent."²⁴ Such a philosophy situates the present not only in relation to its past but also in relation to its future. It does this by considering the present with reference to what it might become, once the possibilities that are latent within it are recognized, acted upon, and hence *realized*. The orientation of this philosophy is, therefore, practical: it is concerned with history-making, or *praxis*.

A "philosophy of history with a practical intent" concedes the effectiveness of history for human life, and hence the impossibility of discovering a vantage point outside of history from which the significance of events in history may be evaluated and judged. That much of Gadamer's argument is accepted by Habermas. But he opposes a notion of an "effective future," as it were, to Gadamer's concept of history as an effective past. Since the future, too, is in history, it can provide a reference point for understanding our present situation, in the same way that the past does. By anticipating what we might become, we may understand that which we have not yet become because of the distorting influence of tradition, which reconciles us to what we are. The tension between what we are and what we may become establishes a distance that only practice can overcome, as we strive to become that which we are not but which is possible for us to become.

The possibility of such action depends on the distance between present and future, and upon our recognition that this is a distance that calls for action, since it can only be overcome by "becoming." Habermas's "philosophy

of history with a practical intent" creates this possibility by enabling us to envision a future that is ours to make, albeit within certain limitations. It allows Habermas to outline the conditions under which humans can become aware of the possibilities for making history that are "present" in the present.

Not surprisingly, the particular version of a "philosophy of history with a practical intent" adopted by Habermas is a reformulation of Marx's historical materialism. After all, Marx wrote, "Men make their history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly found, given and transmitted from the past. The tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living."²⁵

Precisely for this reason, the task of a "philosophy of history with a practical intent" must aim at dispelling this nightmare. It must be oriented toward the critique of tradition in its ideological aspect, so that the future can be restored to the present as a human possibility.²⁶ Habermas represents, therefore, the latest in a long line of exponents of what Ricoeur calls a "hermeneutics of suspicion" oriented toward demystifying tradition.²⁷ That is the enlightenment project, whereas Gadamer espouses a "hermeneutics of faith" that forms the romantic antithesis of the enlightenment.

The critical moment of Habermas's "hermeneutics of suspicion" originates in a foreground of anticipation. The universal foreground of all communication, where "fore" means before in a transcendental sense, is the ideal speech situation, upon which unavoidable fiction the possibility of understanding rests. This ideal speech situation permits us to reconstruct a historical discourse as it would have proceeded in the absence of any distortions introduced by inequalities of power. In so doing, it allows us to identify systematic distortions of communication embedded in traditions. The partiality of traditions is thereby exposed and recognized as partiality, and at the same time is criticized *for* partiality. Hence, a tradition may be appropriated in its entirety, and thereby transcended, insofar as the power of tradition over the present is broken by this critical reflection on it.

Gadamer's "hermeneutics of faith," on the other hand, raises a foreground of interpretation that is not universal but situated in time. The "fore" here means before in a historical sense. *Every* interpretation is limited by its history and is specific to a time and place in history. Although new interpretations are possible and, indeed, necessary for traditions to persist in time, they, too will be time-bound. Hence, there is no escape from the hermeneutical situation, only a recognition of its necessity.

VII

A hermeneutics of suspicion requires a vantage point upon which its suspicions may be founded. Whence can this critique of ideology be launched if not from the world of our experience, i.e., the tradition-bound situation in which hermeneutics operates? Habermas's answer is derived from his theory of communicative competence, which is an attempt to understand what, practically speaking, must be assumed in order for an understanding to be reached. That is, it seeks to identify the minimal conditions that must be satisfied before an understanding can be achieved.

Gadamer, it will be remembered, construes hermeneutics as action oriented toward reaching an understanding. Habermas's strategy for criticizing the inadequacy of this approach is to observe that this conception of the hermeneutic enterprise *presumes* an idea of understanding that is largely unexplicated in Gadamer's own work. By trying to understand what is necessarily implied in the very idea of understanding, Habermas hopes to arrive at some basis for distinguishing instances in which a genuine "meeting of the minds" has been achieved from those which present only the appearance or semblance of understanding. Obviously, such a benchmark would vindicate Habermas's claim that a true or genuine understanding of a tradition depends on a critical appropriation of the tradition as a whole, in which the ideological dimension of the tradition is laid bare.

The essence of this critical vantage point is summarized in the notion of an "ideal speech situation," in which only the forceless force of persuasion is involved in bringing about an agreement or consensus among those trying to arrive at an understanding. This situation, in which reason rather than authority determines the outcome of efforts to achieve agreement, provides a regulative ideal that governs communicative action. It governs or regulates communication insofar as all action oriented toward reaching an understanding anticipates an exchange among equals free from the distortions of power and influence. Indeed, this and only this anticipation provides a rationale for participating in discourse in the first place, since an obviously "closed" discourse would induce few to participate in a process whose outcome was predetermined.²⁸

To be sure, the conditions that define an ideal speech situation are never realized in practice.²⁹ Still, the anticipation of it is an "unavoidable fiction (on which) rests the humanity of intercourse among men who are still men."³⁰ Ideal speech is a pragmatic assumption, not an empirical account, of communicative action. Without it, the very idea of understanding would be unintelligible.

How can the ideal speech situation be used to destroy the effectivity of the authority of tradition over the present? According to Habermas,

reflection of ideal speech provides a way of revealing the systematic distortions of communication that are embedded in a tradition and which lend it ideological force. The power (not authority) of traditions is a function of the invisibility of these distortions. Once they are made visible, *i.e.* raised to consciousness, they lose their ability to distort communication. They are then susceptible to criticism from the standpoint of ideal speech.

However, this does not mean that we simply compare ideal to real discourse and measure the extent of distortion. Rather, it requires that we reconstruct a historical discourse in order to arrive at some understanding of how that particular discourse *would* have proceeded in the *absence of systematic distortions*. The orienting question in this reconstructive effort is:

[H]ow would the members of a social system, at a given stage in the development of productive forces, have collectively and bindingly interpreted their needs (and which norms would they have accepted as justified) if they could and would have decided on organization of social intercourse through discursive will-formation, with adequate knowledge of the limiting conditions and functional imperatives of their society?³¹

Thus, the notion of ideal speech cannot be applied in unmediated form. It must first be translated into concrete form, *i.e.*, a form within history. Once this counterfactual situation has been created, it is then compared to the actual discourse as it took place. To the extent that the actual discourse diverges from the reconstructed discourse, systematic distortions are presumed to be operating.

Ideal speech does not provide a "blueprint" for future society; it has no utopian content. Instead, it makes permanent the possibility of criticizing our understanding of the present and its possibilities by establishing a purely negative reference point. The formal conditions identified with the ideal speech situation can never be fulfilled; attempts to realize them will always fall short. Consequently, a difference between what we are and what we might become will always exist, a difference that calls for action oriented toward the future. In this way, the "unavoidable fiction upon which human society" rests constitutes an *effective future* that may be used to destroy the effectiveness of the past over the present.

VIII

The deployment of counterfactual dialogues against the past and present in order to grasp the ideological aspect of tradition is an exercise in critical

hermeneutics. As Benhabib describes it, this involves "letting the past generate meanings that can show the way to overcome the present for the future,"³² which can only be done within a framework that explodes the contradictions that are present in the "thematic universe" of our experience. A thematic universe is a complex of "generative themes" according to which the members of a given culture understand the world and their relation to it. These themes are a defining feature of reality, since it is in and through them that the members of society apprehend reality. Of course, in defining or constituting reality, these generative themes also define the possibilities for change that are present in "reality." That is why Freire calls them generative themes: they generate possibilities for action, once it is understood that reality is a social construction, and not something that is objectively given to human beings.³³

Because of the generative powers of such themes, any pedagogy of the oppressed must strive to activate them by raising them to consciousness. If this can be done without manipulation, "reality" will appear as something problematic, i.e., as a problem to be solved in *praxis*, as a drama to be concluded in action. Properly conceived, a pedagogy of the oppressed eventuates in an experiment in remaking reality, not just in theory, but in practice as well. It constitutes an episode in the unfolding of human action on the future.

How can these themes be activated? Freire seems to imply that a given thematic universe may be unlocked by certain keywords, out of which the themes are constructed.³⁴ According to Williams, such words are significant and binding in certain activities and their interpretation; and they are significant, indicative words in certain forms of thought. The investigation of a culture's vocabulary of keywords is therefore an analysis of particular formations of meaning.³⁵

Keywords have special political import, because control over their meaning represents control over cultural perceptions of reality and its unrealized potential. Because of their thematic centrality, keywords are at once words of domination and liberation, depending on how they are used and by whom. When oppressed people use their oppressors' keywords uncritically, they literally inhabit a world that is defined *for* them. But when oppressed people use keywords authentically to define their world for themselves, they have liberated themselves in a quite decisive way. They have rebelled against their oppression, and if those who hold power over them are to retain that power, they must repress the rebels.

Therefore, the experimental use of keywords is necessarily a threat to existing patterns of domination. Precisely because of the practical consequences of such experimentation, the conquest of keywords is always an important part of the function of reigning ideologies. By the same token,

the repossession of keywords by the oppressed is almost always rightly seen as an act of defiance and rebellion, especially by those engaged in the experimental use of keywords. "Renaming the world" is not merely a symbolic act, but a substantive challenge to power.

Of course, one of the most important keywords is "history" itself. The meaning of history, and especially of what it means to do history, becomes problematical when groups of people attempt to make history.³⁶ Virtually all liberation movements encounter a time in their struggles when it seems necessary to repossess their pasts, their "histories," before any further progress can be made or even before their gains may be consolidated. That is, it seems essential to reject conventional histories of themselves, and indeed conventional historiography *tout court*, in order to establish an identity for themselves.

For instance, the practical significance of "history" is well-known to the feminist movement. Mary Daly reports that feminists who have been struggling to build women's studies courses and programs speak to each other of the eerie experience of meeting a generation of young women who have no familiarity with books such as *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*, *Three Guineas*, *The Second Sex*, *Sisterhood Is Powerful*, and *The First Sex*: the writings that were central to the experiences of the educators themselves. "It's like beginning from square one. It's like reinventing the wheel. It's as if nothing ever happened. They seem lobotomized. We should have foreseen this."³⁷

In fact, some women *did* foresee this. It was the strategic importance of history that led women to see in *feminist history* a rich source of inspiration and solidarity, linking women of all ages to one another in their common struggle against male supremacy.³⁸ Moreover, true history recorded the victories of women in this struggle. It recognized the political ground won at great cost by women and secured by ensuring that it would not have to be won again. History of, by, and for women was the surety of whatever progress had been made, preserving whatever truths had been discovered as a matter of public record.

A less well-known example of this phenomenon is the use by socialist organizers of local histories of the working class as consciousness-raising devices.³⁹ These histories tell the story of the working class in a particular locale. They relate the arduous process by which that class organized itself, presented its demands, and either triumphed or (more likely) succumbed. As such, they offer later laborers concrete evidence of the forceful presence of the working class in history, a class that participated in the making of local history and so also in the creation of the present situation.

This type of history accomplishes two things. First, it challenges conventional wisdom, which presents the present either as having no history

or as representing the culmination or end of history. In so doing, it denies the future; more to the point, it denies the working class any role in making the future. "People's history" exposes this denial by showing human institutions for what they are—human creations that, because they are human creations, are subject to recreation. In the words of Jack Lawson, it shows that "our institutions have not yet arrived."⁴⁰

Second, people's history and the type of historical consciousness which it propagates can help the working class become a class for itself. It presents the future not only as a possible arena of working class action but as a necessary one as well. It does this by reminding workers that their "lives are connected with the lives, struggles, and understandings of previous generations" and that, because of this, "a common moral responsibility (is) inherent in the historical process, both backwards to our parents' and grandparent's generations, and forwards to our children and those who come after them."⁴¹

Thus, a subversive consciousness of history—of their place in the story—involves actors in a way that requires them to continue the story in a certain direction or, at least, with a certain intention. Theory returns to practice by way of historical reflection on the story that is ours.

The fight between an effective past and an effective future is therefore an essential contest between a hermeneutics of faith and one of suspicion. At times, one or the other seems to have a decisive advantage, only to be put on the defensive when the "hes" and "shes" of the present make their intentions known to these "theoretical antagonists." In fact, that is what a political tradition is: a shifting battleline between past and future that is the present.

For this reason, we may tell the political story of certain keywords by recounting past struggles to control their meaning. This story is at once a history of political traditions and a political history that enters into and extends the life of those traditions, for it presents the political world as a human creation. If the meaning of keywords is that their meaning is worked out among contending parties, then their meaning for us is never something that is given; it must be taken. By recalling this, by remembering the history of the political traditions that engulf us, we may reawaken those traditions and ignite new discourses on the meaning of keywords *for us*. In the next section, I suggest how this might be done.

IX

By construing traditions as more or less continuous "essential contests" over the meaning of the keywords that constitute those traditions, we may

inspire action oriented toward the future. If we tell the story of traditions by remembering the essential contests that comprise the various episodes in their history, we are also implicitly suggesting that future episodes depend on our actions. Certainly we cannot act just as we please, but the fact remains that the meaning the future holds for us must be made by us in the course of contests over the meaning of the keywords which comprise our political universe. By telling the story from this point of view, we call for action that will continue the story and so will extend the life of a tradition into the future.

Hence, the narrative structure of our history directs our attention toward the future, a future whose meaning is ours to make, but only by extending and perhaps changing our past. Remembrance of times lost, both past and future, is the unifying act by which we make our history. Without remembrance, there is neither past nor future, only a dispossessed present of aimless searching; for as Tocqueville observed, where the past throws no light on the future, the human spirit wanders in darkness.⁴²

By the same token, where the future holds no attraction for those who live in the present, no future exists for the present. When a political community identifies itself exclusively with its past, forgetting its future, it has no future of its own. It has only the past and a present that is continually receding into the past.

Where either past or future are lost to the present, then, there can be no real identity for a political community: one who loses identity and intentions counts for nothing. The person exists only insofar as personal identity remains an identity that does not destroy the difference that underlies all identities.⁴³ Only when personal intentions are partially identified with the past and partially identified with the future can there be a present that is distinct from either.

Hence, there can be no question of a choice between past and future in order to act in the present. There must be some point of contact between the hermeneutics of faith and the hermeneutics of suspicion that will fuse not only past and present but present and future in an unbroken horizon of history. For, as Ricoeur says, the "choice" between an ontology of prior understanding and the project of freedom is a false antinomy: "eschatology is nothing without the recitation of acts of deliverance from the past."⁴⁴ That is, the "power" of ideal speech to expose authority for what it is, namely domination, and to inspire action oriented toward overcoming domination, depends on a creative renewal of cultural heritage. This is because:

[d]istortions can be criticized only in the name of a consensus which we cannot anticipate merely empty, in the manner of a regulative ideal, unless that ideal is

exemplified; and one of the very places of exemplification of the ideal of communication is precisely our capacity to overcome cultural distance in the interpretation of works received from the past. He who is unable to reinterpret his past may also be incapable of projecting concretely his interest in emancipation.⁴⁵

This raises the question of the appropriate form of language in which critical theory must be expressed if it is to become a material force in the world, i.e., a force that motivates action on the future which is present as potential.⁴⁶ For critical theory to "seize the masses" and hence become a material force in the world, it must first and foremost be expressed in a language that can be grasped by the audience of critical theory. I have elsewhere discussed this issue in terms of the rhetorical adequacy of critical theory and the restrictions on rhetorical strategies that are necessary if critical theory is to be educative rather than manipulative.⁴⁷ Here I shall concentrate on the form of language that is best-suited for inspiring action oriented toward liberation.

That form is, I submit, the narrative; for it is narration that establishes the basic framework in which we understand the present in relation to its past and future.⁴⁸ The structure of a narrative is the structure of our experience in time *as we understand it*: "We are members of the field of historicity *as storytellers, as novelists, as historians*. . . . The game of telling is included in the reality told."⁴⁹

It is not simply that the narrative form is a useful way of understanding human events. It is indispensable, because it constitutes the structure of our experience. "In other words, *the form of life to which narrative discourse belongs is our historical condition itself*."⁵⁰ Consequently, the relationship between historicity and narrativity is fundamental; historicity is the form of life correlative to the language game of narrating.⁵¹

Thus, we understand ourselves in narrative terms by placing ourselves and those with whom we interact in the context of an unfolding "plot." Our lives are embedded within a story line that stretches from the actions that have led to the present to those that may follow. That story renders intelligible our relation to the past by referring to its continuation in the future. A plot progresses toward the future, and the future acts as a pole of attraction in the whole process.⁵²

Nevertheless, the conclusion of this process can be neither deduced nor predicted from the plot line: "there is no story unless our attention is held in suspense by a thousand contingencies. Hence we must follow the story to its conclusion. So rather than being *predictable*, a conclusion must be *acceptable*."⁵³ Or rather, it must be *intelligible*. As MacIntyre observes, an indefinite number of conclusions will make sense of a story, even though not every conclusion will do so.⁵⁴

A musical analogy to this unfolding of action may be useful. A jazz improvisation "improves" on what went before in the play of music, and it may do so in any number of ways. Each improvement leads to further improvements, and so on until a virtually endless improvisation may be conceived, if not actually played. Nevertheless, the indeterminacy of this process does not mean that is unconstrained. Not just anything counts as an improvement, and some improvements lead nowhere. Moreover, the whole improvisation builds on what went before.

In the same way, the "story" that we live and about which we weave our own narratives is affected by actions that have gone before: history is effective. Hence, we "act out" our lives "upon a stage which we did not design and we find ourselves part of an action that [is] not of our making."⁵⁵ Still, the outcome of the story remains in doubt, since it depends in part on the way in which we, the *dramatis personae*, perform roles that remain to be written by us. Insofar as we are able to grasp our present situation and the possibilities contained therein, and then act upon those possibilities, the story may continue indefinitely and unpredictably.

Indeed, the value of Habermas's attempt to establish a negative reference point lies precisely in the permanent tension which it establishes between present and future. We do not move toward ideal speech and its realization at some point in the future, at which point our story ends. Rather, we improve our present situation by recognizing its openness to action. We anticipate the future, improvise our story, and so carry the plot ever forward in time.

X

Because our history is narratively structured, it "points" toward the future. "History is only present to us in light of our futurity. Here we have all learned from Heidegger, for he exhibited the primacy of futurity for our possible recollection and retention, and for the whole of our history."⁵⁶

If futurity is the condition of memory, memory is the safeguard of futurity.⁵⁷ Precisely because the circumstances in which men and women act are not of their choosing, effective action—i.e., action oriented toward changing the world—depends on an understanding of those circumstances and the limits they impose upon action.⁵⁸ Without this understanding, action is ineffective, for unless we understand the present in terms of what it has been and what it can become, we will fail to make history. We will run up against the objective limits to action that are present in any historical situation. Indeed, precisely this "realistic" understanding of possibilities

which are latent in society distinguishes the scientific socialism of Marx and Engels from its utopian counterfeit, which strives to realize what cannot be realized.

To see the world as a contradiction of our humanity is, therefore, to see it as something to be dissolved by action, rather than as something to which we must reconcile ourselves in thought. Thus, successful action oriented toward liberation presumes historical knowledge. But another and perhaps more fundamental connection between remembrance and liberation involves the inspiration to act, to make history, that sometimes comes from an appreciation of history. History is, after all, a reminder that human beings can, under certain conditions, make history. They can make the future present, and the present past, by realizing one or another of the possibilities that are "present" in the present through effective action. For that reason, would-be revolutionaries of all stripes call upon history to motivate people to act in the spirit of past revolutionaries and forebearers.

At times, this invocation leads to the results anticipated by Marx in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, where he comments that "Hegel remarks somewhere that all great, world-historical facts and personages occur, as it were, twice. He has forgotten to add: the first time as tragedy, the second as farce."⁵⁹ The "first" revolutionaries make history by transforming their present into its future. But the "second" or "third" generation of revolutionaries who conjure up the dead return the present to a caricatured version of its past. They produce a Louis Bonaparte for Napoleon, a Louis Blanc for Robespierre. Hence they do not make history; they merely parody it.⁶⁰ Thus Marx insisted that "The social revolution of the nineteenth century cannot draw its poetry from the past, but only from the future."⁶¹ True revolutionaries must break with the past in order to achieve their liberation. They must write their own history, rather than engage in a romantic remembrance of things past.

Marx's advice certainly seems sound, insofar as remembrance replaces action on the future in the present. Reveries do not make revolutions; they do not liberate us from the material conditions of our existence. Certain types of remembrance, however, have a different relation to action. They constitute effective action by reminding us that the future is ours. They recall to mind the historicity of our present, which is not the end of time but only a moment within it. They recollect past "presents" that *became* past through the action of men and women who saw the futures that were present for them and whose deeds realized those futures, i.e., *made* them present.

This sort of remembrance, in which all things pass, and in which history is made in the passing, is revolutionary. It restores to us our capacity to act effectively by reminding us of our agency. When we recall not

revolutionary personages or their specific deeds, but the *examples* of making history that constitute our past (and present as well), remembrance and liberation are joined in the present.

My claim here is not merely that history can sometimes be inspiring, leading us to make history. Rather, it is that this sense of our own historicity provided by remembrance is indispensable to effective action, or liberation. To make history *presumes* that we are historical agents and that we are conscious of an "ontological vocation" that is ours by virtue of that fact.⁶² The experience of our own historicity is essential to that realization. Remembrance, understood a certain way, is therefore liberation, since it frees us to act within the confines of a given historical situation.

This is not merely a philosophical point. As soon as we lose sight of our ontological vocation, we can no longer make our history, for then we have forgotten our agency. We become the "bearers" of history, rather than its makers. Unless we can remember times lost, we will lose time altogether.

XI

I do not wish to minimize the difficulty of doing theory in the narrative mode. As Sally Helgesen observes, our ability to use the past depends on more than a simple desire to do so, "for the true use involves an interchange, a reciprocity. A living culture can use an older one only by absorbing something from the past into itself and so making a vanished world continue to live even as it stretches contemporary definitions of human possibility."⁶³ In the manufacture of ersatz "traditions," this reciprocity is lacking; and so the relationship between past and present is inauthentic. Consequently, these erstwhile traditions do not possess the motivating force necessary to subvert the present, i.e., to stretch contemporary definitions of human possibility.⁶⁴

Conversely, the attempt to uncover what we have been in order to see what we may become can be quite terrifying. Authentic remembrance is very painful. Daly draws a description of this problem from Adrienne Rich:

Ordinarily one would associate the search for knowledge with eagerness, curiosity, the thirst to know. But for us (that is, feminists), much of what we have to learn is depressing at least, sickening at worst. The *desire* for knowledge of our condition and in particular of gynocide and the enemy status to which we have been relegated is in direct conflict with the *burden* of horror and revulsion which that knowledge imposes on us. Several women who are now writing books on pornography, female child abuse, and female sexual enslavement have expressed to me the agony of

working for hours daily with such materials, having literally to drive themselves to the source of knowledge. . . . In this pre-exorcistic state the terror of what one knows one is going to have to know paralyzes the Searcher. And there is the sense that one has uncovered it—"After such knowledge, what forgiveness?"—in the words of T. S. Eliot, who little knew.⁶⁵

The paralysis that grips those whose history is one of repressed possibilities can only be overcome by the conviction that their remembrance is necessary in order for new possibilities to emerge.⁶⁶ The possibility of progress does not, of course, justify past foreclosures of human possibility: "the horror remains always the same, for the horrible is not to be outdone."⁶⁷ In that sense, there is no forgiveness. But there is a future; or at least, there may be a future, once our agency is recalled. For this reason, our interest in the future may sustain us in the painful remembrance of things past, even though the past itself is beyond redemption.

This is where subversive political theory finds its place. The job of the theorist is not to provide a theory of the future. It is not to name the future by claiming knowledge about what the future holds, and recommending actions in accordance with that knowledge. That would foreclose possibilities. Rather, the primary function of political theory is to subvert the present in the name of a future that is ours. It reminds us that the future, whatever it holds, is one that is in important ways of our own making. It invites us to make history.

For that reason, the test of political theory is ultimately a practical one: does it contribute in some way to the continuation of the story it tells by recalling our historical agency? If so, the story will progress as the validity of political theory is proved by the actions of those to whom it is addressed. If not, the story will end, not because it has reached its natural conclusion, but because our ability to understand what we are doing is insufficient to render intelligible our next move. This may be a temporary setback or more prolonged, depending on the narrative powers of our political theory.

Consequently, a political theory that is truly serious about action must orient itself toward the future if it is to answer the questions that define a discipline like political theory in *regional* terms. As Gunnell notes, we currently lack a "disciplinary matrix" capable of explaining why the history of political thought deserves attention, what works ought to be the focus of our concern, or how they should be approached and interpreted—in short, what the history of political thought means.⁶⁸ Such questions can only be answered on the basis of an interest in the future, in the making of history.

Alternately, political theorists might abandon their interest in subversion. But that may not free them from the responsibility that comes from doing political theory. The only way to evade that responsibility, if it can be evaded at all, is to stop telling stories, to alienate themselves from political theory. Far better that we heed the example of the raconteur who begins *The Left Hand of Darkness* by saying, "I'll make my report as if I told a story, for I was taught on my homeworld that Truth is a matter of the imagination."⁶⁹

Notes

1. I wish to thank Christi Barbour, Fred Dallmayr, Keith Fitzgerald, Booth Fowler, Dick Merriman, John Nelson, and Elizabeth Trousdell for their comments on an earlier draft. Connie Hanson made several helpful suggestions on the organization of this version.
2. ETK.
3. PSTA, 75.
4. PT, 161.
5. PT, 160.
6. MMST.
7. Ira L. Strauber, "Politics and Values in a World without Criteria," this volume.
8. PTTA.
9. Strauber attributes this expression to: David Pears, *Ludwig Wittgenstein*, New York, Viking Press, 1969, 184.
10. Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, Notre Dame, IN, University of Notre Dame Press, 1981.
11. I use the common English translation of Marcel Proust's great novel, *À la recherche du temps perdu*. It really ought to be translated *Remembrance of Times Lost*, since *perdu* means lost, as well as past. The significance of recovering time—both past and future—would then be made apparent.
12. This "debate" is contained in: Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, Garret Barden and John Cumming, eds., New York, Seabury Press, (1960, 1965), 1975. It is reviewed in: Jürgen Habermas, "A Review of Gadamer's *Truth and Method*," *Understanding and Social Inquiry*, Fred R. Dallmayr and Thomas A. McCarthy, eds., Notre Dame, University of Notre Dame Press, 1977, 335–363. Gadamer replies in: *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, David E. Linge, ed. and trans., Berkeley, University of California Press, 1976. (These are the English translations, which appeared out of chronological order.)

13. Cf. footnote 21 below.

14. Gadamer's argument here is ontological: because we *are* in time, we must understand ourselves in time. For us, there is no other way to achieve understanding; we cannot escape the finitude of the hermeneutic situation of being in time. With respect to the problem of understanding, it is "Not what we are doing, not what we ought to be doing but what happens with us beyond our wanting and doing, (that) is in question." (Gadamer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, xiv.) Hence, tradition "is not simply a precondition into which we come, but we produce it ourselves, inasmuch as we understand, participate in the evolution of tradition and further determine it ourselves. Thus the circle of understanding is not a 'methodological' circle, but describes an ontological structural element in understanding." (Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 261.)

15. Gadamer, quoted in: Habermas, "A Review of Gadamer's *Truth and Method*," 356.

16. Cf. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 267: "A proper hermeneutics would have to demonstrate the effectivity of history within understanding itself. I refer to this as 'effective-history.' Understanding is, essentially, an effective-historical relation."

17. Gadamer, quoted in: Paul Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, John B. Thompson, ed. and trans., Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1981, 73-74.

18. Habermas, "A Review of Gadamer's *Truth and Method*," 351.

19. Gadamer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, 63, emphasis added.

20. Habermas, "A Review of Gadamer's *Truth and Method*," 360; quoted in Gadamer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, 31.

21. In *Keywords*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1976, 269, Raymond Williams observes that tradition can also mean "hand over" in the sense of betrayal or surrender. Hence, "extradition" refers to the surrender of a prisoner by one authority to another. Here the surrender is to the authority of the past by the sovereignty of the present.

22. Habermas, "A Review of Gadamer's *Truth and Method*," 358.

23. *Ibid.*, 360.

24. *Ibid.*, 361.

25. Karl Marx, *The Marx-Engels Reader*, Robert C. Tucker, ed., New York, Norton, 1972, 437.

26. Lest I be misunderstood here, let me emphatically deny any sympathy with a crude determinism. The material conditions of our existence are the circumstances, not of our choosing, in which we must act. Once we realize that these conditions "determine" our existence only insofar as we fail to change them (within historical limits), they lose their power. Once we realize that the conditions of our existence

are *social* conditions that we subject to human action, revolutionary action is possible. That is the whole point of a *historical* materialism, which, in contradistinction to Feuerbach's *contemplative* materialism, aims to realize the truth of Albert Camus's insight that "crushing truths perish from being acknowledged." (*The Myth of Sisyphus, and Other Essays*, New York, Random House, 1955, 90.)

27. Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, 34.

28. Formally, the ideal speech situation is characterized by symmetry. In an ideal speech situation, communicative processes are undistorted because the participants sincerely engage in discourse freed from the constraints of action, i.e., from the context of power which distorts ordinary discourses. Moreover, the play of discourse proceeds via argumentative give-and-take in which all possible participants enjoy equal chances of initiating conversation, advancing claims, challenging others' claims, and recommending suitable norms for making practical decisions. For a summary of these conditions and an explanation of the function of ideal speech in Habermas's overall project, see: Stephen K. White, "Reason and Authority in Habermas: A Critique of the Critics," *American Political Science Review*, 74, 4, December, 1980, 1006-1018.

29. Nevertheless, Habermas argues that situations in which one or another condition is not satisfied may (only) be understood as deviations from their ideal. Cf. *Communication and the Evolution of Society*, Thomas A. McCarthy, trans., Boston, Beacon Press, 1980.

30. Thomas A. McCarthy, "A Theory of Communicative Competence," *Philosophy of the Social Sciences*, 3, 2, June, 1973, 135-156, on 140.

31. Jürgen Habermas, *Legitimation Crisis*, Thomas A. McCarthy, trans., Boston, Beacon Press, 1975, 113.

32. Seyla Benhabib, "Modernity and the Aporias of Critical Theory," *Telos*, 49, Fall, 1981, 39-60, on 58.

33. Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Myron B. Ramos, trans., New York, Seabury Press, 1970.

34. *Ibid.*

35. Williams, *Keywords*, 13.

36. The close connection between doing history (in the sense of telling a story about events in the world) and making history (in the sense of participating in the events that are narrated) is evident in the double meaning of "history." It means both the telling and the making of a story, as many interpreters have noted.

37. Mary Daly, *Gyn/Ecology*, Boston, Beacon Press, 1978, 348-349.

38. With the realization that "the purpose of history is to illuminate our experience" and that "the present must rule the use of the past," a truly feminist historiography, as distinct from a history of women, was launched. Kathie Sarachild, "The Power

of History," *Feminist Revolution*, Redstockings, eds., New York, Random House, 1978, 37.

39. Raphael Samuel, ed., *People's History and Socialist Theory*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981.

40. Quoted in: Ken Warpole, "A Ghostly Pavement: The Political Implications of Local Working-Class History," *People's History and Socialist Theory*, 22-31, on 25.

41. *Ibid.*, 25.

42. Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, J.P. Mayer, ed., George Lawrence, trans., Garden City, NY, Doubleday, 1969, 703.

43. "Identity" is a relational concept. It presumes the existence of a difference that can be shown or made a nondifference, or at least made inessential. When a political community remembers its past or future, the separation in time of the generations in question is overcome. Without that separation or difference, however, the concept of identity loses all sense, for then there is nothing with which to identify. We identify with others, not with ourselves.

44. Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, 100. We may carry the religious theme a bit further: would the Christian doctrine of salvation be as powerful as it is without the Incarnation of the Word in the life of Christ? One need only compare the Judaic tradition, with its promise of a Messiah, to its Christian offspring in order to appreciate the profound impact that remembrance has on eschatology.

45. *Ibid.*, 97.

46. Cf. Karl Marx, *Karl Marx's Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, Joseph O'Malley, ed. and trans., Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1970, 137, emphasis added: "The weapon of criticism cannot replace the criticism of weapons, material force must be overthrown by material force; but theory, too, becomes a material force once it seizes the masses."

47. Russell L. Hanson, *The Democratic Imagination in America: Conversations With Our Past*, Ph.D. dissertation, Department of Political Science, University of Minnesota, 1982, 383ff.

48. In "History and Evolution," *Telos*, 39, Spring, 1979, 5-44, on 40-41, Habermas argues that a critical theory of evolution "needs no further narrative reshaping, [and] cannot even be brought into narrative form" without leading to a "theory of development claiming to be a theory of history [that] makes us the unfulfillable offer of predicting historical processes and accepting the role of prophecy." This depends on an implausible distinction between theory and history, as McCarthy shows: *The Critical Theory of Jürgen Habermas*, Cambridge, MA, Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 1978. A theory of social evolution is unavoidably a history of the human species, even though it proceeds at a more abstract level of explanation.

49. Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, 294, emphasis added.

50. *Ibid.*, 288.

51. *Ibid.*, 289.

52. *Ibid.*, 277.

53. *Ibid.*

54. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 201.

55. *Ibid.*, 199.

56. Gadamer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, 9. Despite the philosophical importance of the concept of futurity in philosophical hermeneutics, Gadamer, by his own admission, remains a partisan of the past: "I shall not deny, however, . . . that I have emphasized the element of the assimilation of what is past and handed down." This is because he believes that a corrective is needed to the onesidedness of the modern attitude toward making, producing, and constructing, an attitude that downplays questions about the feasibility or possibility of such practices. Hence, "the hermeneutic consciousness, which must be awakened and kept awake, recognizes that in the age of science the claim of superiority made by philosophic thought has something vague and unreal about it. But it seeks to confront the will of man, which is more than ever intensifying its criticism of what has gone before to the point of becoming a utopian or eschatological consciousness, with something from the truth of remembrance: with what is still and ever again real." (*Truth and Method*, xxvi.) This distinction between willing and remembering or thinking is, of course, a central theme in Hannah Arendt's *The Life of the Mind*, New York, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978, in two volumes.

57. "Memory, in the sense of human thinking that recalls, dwells where everthing that gives food for thought is kept in safety. . . . [It] consists in the 'keeping' of what is most thought-provoking. Keeping is the fundamental nature and essence of memory." (Martin Heidegger, *What Is Called Thinking*, J. Glenn Gray, trans., New York, Harper and Row, 1968, 150-151.)

58. I read Marx's "Eleventh Thesis on Feuerbach" to mean that a contemplative understanding of the world is alienating and that understanding the world *in order* to change it as *techné* rather than *praxis*. Instead, we must understand the world *as* something to be changed, *as* a problem to be solved, *as* a world to be created and recreated in action.

59. Marx, *The Marx-Engles Reader*, 436.

60. Revolutions that seek their legitimacy in the authority of the past "revolve" in time, while those that seek it in the promise of the future "break" with time, exhibiting the two main senses of "revolution."

61. *Ibid.*, 439.

62. Freire, *A Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 12.

63. Sally Helgesen, "Instant Tradition," *Harper's*, 262, 1568, January, 1981, 81-82, on 82.

64. Helgesen's remarks on *ersatz* traditions are directed toward Erica Jong's attempt to uncover a history of sexual liberation in *Fanny*.
65. *Daly*, *Gyn/Ecology*, 323-324.
66. I do not say that remembrance is sufficient. We can only be certain that if we do not remember, and so do not act upon the future, we will not be *makers* of history.
67. Jürgen Habermas, "A Reply to My Critics," *Habermas*, John B. Thompson and David Held, eds., Cambridge, MA, Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 1982, 219-283, on 229.
68. *IHPT*.
69. Ursula K. Le Guin, *The Left Hand of Darkness*, New York, Ace Books, 1969.

CHAPTER VIII

Social Critique in Contemporary Political Theory: On the Contributions of John Gunnell

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Over the last two decades, John Gunnell has developed a remarkable *oeuvre* distinguished by its versatility, breadth, scholarship, and intelligence. In that time, the meaning of "theory" in political science has undergone dramatic changes; it has been a period of very considerable flux characterized particularly by the borrowing of paradigm concepts and models from "cognate" fields. In many instances, these borrowings have been dubious at best, as a partial listing illustrates. Our discipline has explored: systems theories from physics, cybernetics, and engineering; structural-functionalism from sociology and anthropology; literary theories; micro-economics and macroeconomics; Freudian and other depth psychologies; the history of natural science; theology; and even the "failed magic" that was alchemy.¹ These and others were added to more traditional alliances with philosophical and historiographic schools of all descriptions.

Gunnell's muse has dwelt primarily in these last fields. He has written seminal essays on phenomenology, theories of action and of mind, the idea of a political tradition, the meaning of social explanation, and the interpretation of texts. In his first book, on politics and time, he has engaged in primary historical research. He is perhaps best known as a critic of the logical-positivist conception of social science. That model remains attractive to much of the discipline, despite annihilating criticisms from both philosophical and historical directions since the late 1950s or, for that matter, the nineteenth century. Given this impressive body of work, an examination of Gunnell's writings can yield considerable insight into the state of political theory and political science in the mid- to late twentieth century. Through-

out, I concentrate on Gunnell's contribution to social and political criticism, but an initial digression is in order.

Virtually from its earliest emergence, Western political thought has been deeply ambivalent toward its subject matter. By contrast to Homer, who rendered war as epic drama, Plato presented perhaps the definitive formulation of political thought as domestication of politics. Philosophy, the search for truth, is fundamentally at odds with the imperative of politics to exercise power in the world. In this latter sense, action is mute and unreflective; it is categorically and ontologically divorced from the mission of philosophy.² Violence is the paradigm example of what philosophy tries to excise from politics. To be sure, Plato did not present the central imperative of politics as a search for truth, virtue, or beauty. Nonetheless, his remarkable attempt to tame the chaos of politics by the discipline of philosophy has remained an unrealized but beguiling ambition. Historically, philosophy (or reflective thought) has never found a means of entering the universe of action, i.e., of sustaining its claim to transcendence while yet proving effective in the realm of events.³

This historical tension was heightened in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries by the emergence of constitutional democracy. In the concluding chapter of *Political Theory: Tradition and Interpretation*, Gunnell himself notes that Plato's *Republic* celebrated the heroic role of the philosophical founder, while modern democracy within a constitutional system enshrines interest and consent as its central values. Yet neither interest nor consent provides an exciting or (for want of a better word) "worthy" mode of human enterprise. For the past two centuries, in fact, practices of politics have inclined increasingly toward *macht politik* and this has been legitimated by the discipline which purports to study politics.

But this is only half of the story. Political practices, categories, vocabularies, and characteristic modes of conduct have been abandoned by their theory. That returns us to Gunnell, for he has complained insistently about the alienation of political theory from politics. "Political" entities are no longer prominent or (often) even present among the analytical units of political theory: not legislatures, executives, interest groups, or (excepting the Marxist tradition) even classes. Instead of collective or political issues, government institutions, or political events, we read of minds, motives, languages, personal ethics, and various aesthetics. Walter Benjamin, Michael Oakeshott, and John Rawls provide our current models of the craft of political theorizing: a literary critic, a historian, and a philosopher. (Complaints notwithstanding, Gunnell's own work is importantly informed by resources of these cognate disciplines.)

When we recall the vocation of social and political criticism, however, this legacy disappoints. In most of the world, recent political practices are

not simply unintelligent but unimaginative, uninspired, and dull—where not horrifying in their violence and cruelty. For the most part, these practices fail to address the essential problems of either advanced or developing nations. The failure may be attributed to a variety of reasons, not least the inability of the institutions in either Western democracies or Soviet tyrannies to generate societies able to sustain the values of justice and equality. In *The Politician: The Life and Times of Lyndon Johnson*, Ronnie Dugger is only a recent voice among many pungent commentators on the transformation of American society.

When you promise to show a boy a mansion of many gardens ["the beauty and wisdom of the idea"] and take him, instead, to a whorehouse ["an odious farce"] he wonders about you

As fascism is usually conceived in Europe, it is the ruling of a people by a merger of government and big business. The predatorial politician whose banal motive is his own power and wealth, has now acquired an historically important role as the principal agent in the impending debasement of the world's foremost experiment in democracy. In the Johnson Period [between the administrations of FDR and Ronald Reagan] we are dealing not merely with more episodes of American politicians using their public standing for corporate [including many unions] interests. Now we must deal with the prospect (which some believe is already the reality) that the two kinds of predators, the corporate and the political, will join their techniques and interests so thoroughly, the United States will become the Incorporated Democracy, its rulers periodically still chosen in elections, but in elections that present the people only carefully pre-limited options and are then dominated by the themes and devices of the conspiracies between the corporate and political predators.⁴

Here, purged of much of its arcanity and rendered in a native tradition of muckraking or investigative journalism, is the critique of Marcuse's work in the 1960s.⁵

It is the burden of this essay that mainstream American academic political theory has defaulted on its obligation to offer viable resources for critical analysis of contemporary politics. Its task cannot be to demonstrate the urgency of creating or reviving a radical political critique; whether the reader is moved to assent to the particular formulations employed above is immaterial. Those unpersuaded by their own experience with the course of recent Western history of the necessity for such an adversarial enterprise should probably put these pages aside at this time. My point is that an awesome hiatus exists in our public culture between the muckraking journalism of *The Nation*, *Mother Jones*, or *The Washington Monthly* and the articles which find favor with *The American Political Science Review*, *The Journal of Politics*, or *Political Theory*. Academic political theory has,

in fact, almost nothing to say about current political practice. Even the writing in *Telos* finds more fascination in epistemology and ethics than in politics.

Why, one is moved to wonder, should this be the case? The first, most obvious answer is that political theorists incline in temperament and intellect to be closer to Plato than Lyndon Johnson. A second and deeper answer is that the ontological stuff of politics resists intellectualization, resists the most natural mode of access of the academic who is also an intellectual to his experienced world. In short, to generate depth and significance in analysis is arduous when the terms are, for example, individual or group interest. Interest is itself a flat, unidimensional, uninspiring concept. Unsurprisingly, intellectuals prefer to explore such richer and more vibrant categories as truth and beauty, or that they favor contemplation to survey research.⁶ In this respect, the ambivalence of Plato's legacy has not been transcended. Finally, the disquieting possibility exists that many still believe the American Dream to be "working," in some manner, or at least to be the best hope in an imperfect world.

But the price has been high. When "scholarly" standards are invoked to inhibit the generation of political criticism, when "theories" become the province of a Cartesian preoccupation with individual consciousness and interpersonal method, they cease to offer the resources necessary to conduct political criticism. Standards of justice, equality, or the like demand connection not only to the vocabularies but also to the practices of our politics: that is, to the issues of contemporary public life. Nonetheless, academic terminologies are telling; they amount to a retreat into a privatized existence which is accessible mostly through debased or technized languages and psychologies. These evoke manufactured and inauthentic experiences which simply do not supply the social basis for a critique of public life.

Community may well have been a problematic concept in Western thought: perhaps as long ago as the seventeenth century, Wilson Carey McWilliams on *The Idea of Fraternity in America* notwithstanding. But we are unlikely to revitalize that idea on a national scale—at least, not within the developed world.⁷ Robert Nisbet's lament for premodern *Gemeinschaft* is unlikely to prevail over that large part of contemporary research and theory in sociology which takes its departure from Ferdinand Toennies' seminal *Gemeinschaft und Gessellschaft*.⁸ Yet, in my view, achievement of community of some sort, on some scale not miniscule is essential to nontrivial social criticism. The salient line, of course, was provided more than a century ago by Marx in the *Theses on Feuerbach*, especially the Eleventh Thesis; and it has been discussed since then as the idea of *praxis*.⁹ I have elsewhere enumerated some paths toward the revitalization of political

critique, but my purpose here is different: to illustrate specifically why academic political theory is not helpful to this task.¹⁰

Gunnell himself writes of political theory's alienation from its practice and itself; but his analysis remains idealist, almost Hegelian.¹¹ He addresses a community almost exclusively within the international academy, and his *praxis* consists in producing essays and monographs on subjects of concern to that audience. There is no personal fault in this. Not everyone will be persuaded that critique is urgent and must now stand high on the agenda of political theory. Even those so persuaded may harbor legitimate doubts that an enterprise based primarily within the academy can or even should give itself over to such critical commitment. Such doubts stem, not from a lingering allegiance to the discredited dichotomy of fact and value, but from sociocultural constraints imposed by the contemporary university. Unhappily from a critical perspective, Clark Kerr's projection of the "multiversity" has proved more accurate than New Left hopes of the campus as an incubator of radical social change.

The question here, however, is what Gunnell's work and related literatures contribute to the vocation of the social critic? The answer is: not much. To be sure, there are social critics who also profess themselves academics. Some even use tools of logical empiricism, phenomenology, analytical philosophy, or deconstruction. Still, their critical commitment stands outside and independent of such theories or methods. It does not flow from them; at most, it is contingently informed by them, and often it must maintain itself despite its supporting theories.

Many critics have argued successfully that the commitment of logical positivism and empiricism to correspondence views of verification ensures "one dimensionality." At least, there is no foundation for criticizing the mapped "reality." Phenomenology is embraced by many "radical" critics, but almost invariably when conjoined to some explicitly critical social theory, frequently that of the Frankfurt School.¹² By "analytical philosophy," I mean ordinary-language analysis, philosophy of action and mind, and much of the extensive literature on explanation in social science. Writing of Hannah Arendt's distinctive political philosophy, Taylor Branch contrasts her effort with these prevailing styles of Anglo-American philosophy. In so doing, he illustrates economically their limitation—indeed, their abdication—about public matters.

Many [intellectuals], sensing that they would make fools of themselves in politics, retreated into linguistics and the semi-mathematical studies of analytic philosophy, where no one could ever accuse them of trying to take part in the active life. . . . One reason we hear so little on the great issues from contemporary philosophers is that they are engrossed in questions like how the indefinite articles operate in

the various human languages. The very few who dare to address philosophical questions of importance to the world do so in a manner that mocks both philosophy and science. Robert Nozick and John Rawls, for example, recently published books teeming with set theories, equations in symbolic logic, and pseudo-scientific formulas from "economic utility theory"—each seeking to "prove" a cluster of ideas about political philosophy. . . . The long processions of Greek letters and numbers obscured the fact that the ideas behind all the grillwork were lifeless versions of standard conservative and liberal beliefs respectively.¹³

Whether or not such a categorical dismissal is warranted, the truth is that formal, micro *foci* of analytical philosophy provide little sustenance for the critique of society. Possibly the most extreme illustration of the retreat of political theory from its critical posture is the "interpretive turn" to recent literary criticism, particularly deconstruction.

Considered as a species of literary criticism, deconstruction might be seen as the end point of a continuum which begins with injunctions to read the minds of authors, through hermeneutical exegesis in which the text itself bears meaning independent of its author's "intentions," and stretches to deconstructivists, for whom texts yield no determinate or even preferred meaning. Jacques Derrida, perhaps the most prominent figure among deconstructivist critics, reaches this position by resurrecting a very old question in Western philosophy: what is the relationship between symbol and referent? Is it entirely conventional and arbitrary? And if so, are there no denotative renderings, are all linguistic representations connotative and, hence, metaphorical?¹⁴ Although the initial and present practice of deconstructive criticism has affected literature first, its implications are much broader. It is, after all, a theory or metatheory of *interpretation*. Thus, it can apply to particular human actions, as well as to their artifacts or "sedimentations," of which texts constitute only one kind; institutions, laws, mores, and customs all fall within its purview.¹⁵ Deconstruction, then, is or can be seen as a general, epistemological position. It is characterized by skepticism and an iconoclastic posture toward any "authoritative" interpretation. As one recent commentator puts it:

It may well be that in the English-speaking world critics have too often taken for granted what reading is, what goes on in the encounter between reader and text, and the warnings of Deconstruction about the epistemologically treacherous grounds on which this encounter takes place have a salutary side. But to insist that literary and critical texts, when properly "teased," "disturbed," or "levered," must always reveal this underlying quandary is to turn the multitudinous voices of literature into a sad Johnny One-Note; and this, I fear, is what even the best of Deconstruction often threatens to do.¹⁶

If this is an outcome devoutly to be unwished in literary matters, it is, on balance, even more debilitating to critical social theory.

At first glance, deconstruction might appear to support such critique: in particular its propensity to challenge authoritative judgments. But the appearance is purchased at an exorbitant price. Thus Machiavelli's *Prince*, usually taken as a catalogue of technique for keeping power, could be made by a deconstructivist gloss into a Leninist handbook.¹⁷

But much more is at stake. To select but one illustration, epistemological skepticism undermines not simply establishment intellectual and political positions but their alternatives as well. Indeed, a case can be made (not, to be sure, one of formal entailment) that Hume's politics represent the *prudential* issue of such skepticism: better the known devil.¹⁸ A conservative, *status quo* endorsement becomes the preferred position because it is. Generated by imagination and reason, alternatives are more *immediately* if not ultimately vulnerable to corrosion by the skeptical spirit. Put differently, elementary physics should instruct us that inertial states must be overcome by a force at least incrementally superior; thus were skepticism not unreasonably assumed to have a uniformly distributed fallout, its effects would enervate established practices less than those of their critics.

Deconstruction represents an extreme of the process implicit in academic political theory's retreat from what I will here naively call the "real world." This retreat is manifest in a number of dimensions. For example, there has been a flight from the concrete concept of the person: in systems theory, microeconomic and macroeconomic theory, Freudian and drive psychologies, and many kinds of contemporary philosophy. All of these resources have been mined by contemporary metatheorists of politics; but the individual and even, in some cases, the communal identities of their actors or subjects have been lost: either through reductive analyses (e.g., philosophical accounts of "mind" or "motivation") or absorptive collectivities (e.g., "cultures" or statistical aggregates).¹⁹

I have argued, and still maintain, that critique can be valuable even in the absence of a developed alternative.²⁰ Yet a satisfactory or adequate critique must meet minimal requirements, even in its negations. (And in providing negations, it may well present a "positive" alternative.) For example, Edward B. Portis has recently written,

A theory can only be comprehensive if it defines the basic elements of its subject matter. In a science of action one of these elements must be the agent capable of such behavior. In traditional political thought this has typically been the concept of "human nature," differences over which largely account for the divergent prescriptions found in this tradition. In fact, such theories are generally recognized as "normative" just because a definition of human nature is explicitly postulated, from

which are rationally derived political and organizational prescriptions for its realization. While the reasons or causes of the normative authority of the concept of human nature remains obscure, the fact is apparent.

Of course, conceptions similar to Portis's can lead to quite disparate prescriptions. Whether or not one agrees with his emphasis on human nature, though, his remarks remind us that political theory usually courts scholastic irrelevance if it excludes such concepts from its agenda. Moreover, such exclusion is worse for those who would write critical social theory.

The fact that many of the best minds in academic political theory have immersed themselves in metatheoretical tasks and the literatures of cognate fields testifies to circumstances suggested or documented elsewhere: a felt need to rescue the discipline from thrall to the more Neanderthal versions of positivism and to the unattractive nature of American politics, a need for active minds to encounter challenging materials, and many others. One irony of the last two decades of political theory is that the energies of those critically inclined have been absorbed by metatheoretical contests with the logical empiricists. If those foes have dealt only with the most superficial aspects of politics, the heroes have written of it hardly at all, concerning themselves (when not engaged in problems of "knowing" about society) with the elaboration of formal principles of justice, equality, liberty, and the like.

The result has been a culture of *academic* political theory, which generates its own agenda of problems, issues, and conflicts largely independent of historical and contemporary events in the public world. Public concerns are left, by default, to the resigning "policy experts" at Georgetown, Johns Hopkins, or Harvard's Kennedy Center. At least during the last two decades, political theorists nested in more traditional departments have adhered to the disciplinary agenda. Those who seek to maintain the critical commitment have often embraced some variant of Marxism (a tradition not without its own metatheoretical mire). While department and university administrators—though seldom college trustees²²—boast that their faculties include "Marxists," very few examples of a radical sociopolitical critique have emanated from these academics, at least within the community of political theory.²³

But specifically, why has the critical enterprise not found sustenance—let alone inspiration and direction—from recent political theorists and their favored texts? What would be needed to provide critical commitment? Surely, as Portis suggests, the enterprise requires restoring a *person* who could, at least conceptually, bear the roles of actor, victim, and validator—not a ghost who is dissolved by analysis or incorporated in functions. Yet this concept has proved surprisingly difficult to sustain.

Another way to interpret Portis on the centrality of the concept of human nature is to consider his a call to develop a "philosophical anthropology," a vision of man-in-the-world. But Martin Jay's record of *The Dialectical Imagination* reminds us that even the early Critical Theorists of the Frankfurt School were reluctant to postulate any attributes of "essential" humanity. This probably stemmed in part from their readings of Marx, who was willing to consider man as, *au fond*, animal *laborans* but regarded human labor as dynamic, transformative, transcending its own "essence."²⁴ Yet how can an infinitely plastic creature suffer "alienation" or "exploitation," especially if such outrages be deemed historically necessary for ultimate self-realization?²⁵ Not even the critically inclined among political theorists who have repaired to modern or "depth" psychologies have enjoyed more than marginal successes. Neither Freud's recommendation of stoic endurance nor subsequent counsels of "adjustment" promise such support for social critique, notwithstanding Herbert Marcuse's heroic efforts at synthesis.²⁶

But the substantive content of Marxism or psychoanalysis is not the issue here, for Gunnell has written directly about neither. What is at issue and what he has written extensively about is interpretation: specifically, the treatment of theories as texts. As Gunnell writes in reply to Pocock:

If there is a common theme in this work [by the new historicists], it is the claim that the understanding of human action is essentially an exercise in recovering the intentions of the actor which, in turn, is to be achieved by locating the action in its proper linguistic and social context. The assumption is that this applies to the products of action as well and that *there is a fundamental logical symmetry* between hermeneutics and social science . . . and between social science and history.²⁷

From the viewpoint of social critique, the "new history" of John Dunn, John Pocock, and Quentin Skinner at least preserves, indeed emphasizes, the author as actor. Despite the historical freight which Gunnell finds it to bear, the new history is on this score congenial to requirements of social critique. But another ingredient is necessary yet virtually absent from academic political writing: a "theory" or account of the transpersonal practices, laws, and structures which order and oppress individual lives.

Incipiently with the New Criticism, and certainly with deconstructivism, the emergence of textualism threatens such conceptual attention to larger orders. In reviewing *The World, the Text, and the Critic* by Edward Said, Denis Donoghue writes: "It seems to me that if you start with 'rejection of the human subject as grounding center for human knowledge' . . . it follows as night the day that the exercise of power is total and anonymous. What else could it be?"²⁸ Even Michel Foucault, whose best-known work

purports to study such major coercive institutions as asylums and prisons, fails us. "Foucault's insistence upon the anonymity of power, how it is exercised, evidently without anybody in particular exercising it [finds it] nowhere by being everywhere. It follows that there is no place at which resistance can be effected."²⁹

Professor Said urges "that criticism see itself as "life-enhancing and constitutively opposed to every form of tyranny, domination, and abuse; its social goals are noncoercive knowledge produced in the interests of human freedom."³⁰ This is strikingly reminiscent of Jürgen Habermas's call to develop "emancipatory knowledge" serving human liberation. The precise meaning of "noncoercive" and "emancipatory" knowledge is not luminously evident from the writings of its proponents. At a minimum and put bluntly, however, it would have to be capable of informing subjects of what is hurting them. Only after such identification could a *praxis*—a theory of the strategic and tactical levers for altering the circumstances—be formulated.

Western Marxists have long been disappointed by the *enbourgeoisement* and deradicalization of the proletariat. At least since the mid-1950s, they have searched for other viable agents of radical change. They did not immediately realize, however, that designating an alternate class or group of potential liberators also entails redefinition of the nature, mechanisms, and agencies of oppression: e.g., from owners to managers. Only then are connections of victims to oppressors truly dialectical, at least for Marxists. The implication is that, if the concept of personhood dwindles to near invisibility, then agencies of oppression become correspondingly diffuse, invisible, and unreachable.

It is sometimes suggested, and not always by those critically inclined, that political theory should seek "meaning" before truth." It is not always clear what this intends, but Gunnell implies a possibly parallel dichotomy between Rankian and what Arendt called "ideal" or "model" histories. To be sure, Marx would have found the possibility of opposition or even separation between truth and meaning very odd in a radical critique of society. Later vision may be sensitized to discriminating author, text, language, reader, and meaning, thereby discerning numerous tensions in his work. But the idea that language and referent are only metaphorically conjoined is surely incompatible with the thought of Marx and most of his present-day disciples, particularly such champions of "scientific" interpretation as Althusser. If systematic social critique be considered a species of "ideal" history or even an exercise in mythifying, then perhaps it should look to Nietzsche rather than Marx for its inspiration. The problem, of course, is that Nietzsche is a treacherous ally. While he may encourage "salutary illusions" to "liberate" social critics from constraints of Rankian

historicism, he is also (and legitimately) claimed to encourage deconstructivism.

Doubtless, individual critics of society will distribute their emphases differently. Still, imagining a successful critique which abandons all claims to truth content is difficult. Conceiving of such a theory which is not in some part ideal or mythic is equally difficult. Even if no substantive alternative to an extant condition is made explicit, the very fact that criticism can be made implies alternatives, whether golden ages already lost or future utopias yet to be won. Negation implies affirmation.³¹ Of the four schools analyzed in *Political Theory*, the old and new historicists, the hermeneuticists, and the Rankians, Gunnell's sympathies seem to lie most with the second. As Pocock observes, the final chapter finds Gunnell receptive to many central themes of Arendt, Strauss, Voegelin, and Wolin. He shares their conception of the history of political theory, save for their idea of an actual, objective tradition. This is scarcely a minor issue to historians of political theory, as Pocock and Wolin both demonstrate, but it is not of first importance to critical theorists of society.³²

The task of writing general criticism of society has never been easy in the era since the Second World War. The "literary turn" in academic political theory, however, makes it even harder. At a minimum, this turn requires would-be critics to engage a plague of metaproblems. These necessarily divert much energy from substantive concerns and extend the conceptual distance from methodological bases to prescriptive content. Worse, since one goal of a radical critique is the formation of community, textualism makes problematical the minimal requirement of shared communication.³³

Actual or would-be critical theorists might be forgiven an occasional wish that the metaproblems of interpretation and explanation skillfully explored by John Gunnell over the past two decades had remained unexcavated. Certainly, his work reinforces Georg Simmel's observation that the foundations of any discipline are always less secure than the superstructures which they support. This is not to say that, in the unlikely event that a fully adequate (not exclusively or uniquely correct) account of metatheoretical problems and their derivative methodological (or "methodical") principles were established, the tasks of application would become dramatically less demanding. Neither is it to say that issues of meaning and interpretation have nothing to offer the critical theorist. They provide a protean armory for assaulting claims to authority in almost any dimension of the human enterprise. Even so, this resource is purchased in two kinds of coin. On the one hand, interpretive or textual critique risks becoming mired in metatheory; on the other hand, its potential for anarchy can cut against the critic as well as the target. That is one lesson of deconstructivism.

Although Gunnell's work has not directly helped to develop social critique, it has made a contribution (almost unique among political theorists) through its resolute attempt to sort out and confront the issues of what have been very diverse literatures. Few of his colleagues master these literatures to his extent: enabling recognition of parallels among questions of textual interpretation and explanation of human action, explicating the role of intentionality in both, and distinguishing philosophical, methodological, and substantive theoretical issues.

This said, critically-minded theorists may retain reservations about Gunnell's position on textualism, if not his concrete examples of interpretation in the last chapter of *Political Theory*. "If a theory of the text involves, for example, the claim that intentionality is a function of language and not an expression in language of a mental state (which comes close to my position), then the norm of seeking an author's intention must be significantly qualified."³⁴ This sentence gives one pause. In a more philosophically innocent time, Bolsheviks might have imagined the storming of the Winter Palace or the *sansculottes'* taking of the Bastille to constitute not only dramatic acts of heroism but effective liberational *praxis*. What, one wonders, might they have thought, had they been informed that their proper or priority targets should be the oppressive structure of their native languages? And how would we have fared if the edifices which they levelled were naught but architectural metaphors of ruling power?

If these perplexities further burden political critique, however, they also add more freight for pulling by most other engines within the discipline of political theory. In this connection, perhaps Thomas Kuhn's hierarchy of sciences should be reconsidered. While the nomothetic studies such as physics may be rank-ordered by the reach and rigor of their dominant paradigms, the "strength" or relative advancement of the idiographic disciplines might better be assessed by a criterion such as "richness" or even the degree of conflict they sustain.³⁵ This speculation aside, we must assume that a political and social critique which can surmount these additional barriers will be the better for its more challenging passage.

Eventually, Gunnell's posture is accommodationist, if not pluralist. He excommunicates no one but insists that both theoretical and methodical claims be specified, delimited, and clarified. This posture, however, has probably committed him to some years of shuttle diplomacy across academic camps, negotiating separate nonaggression (but perhaps not peace) treaties with his colleagues. On the evidence of this volume, he is further along that road with Pocock than Wolin.

Gadflies, aspostates, heretics, pagans, fools, and prophets can always find refuge in Kierkegaard's perverse choice of a vocation to make the lives of others more complicated or difficult. But Gunnell need not rest his case

there, since he was not the author of our discontents. As one who has labored strenuously to bear oracular testaments from cognate fields to the oft insular *Lebenswelt* of the political theorist, rendering them in terms comprehensible if not wholly endorseable, John Gunnell merits the applause and gratitude of social critics as much as others in the house of political theory.

Notes

1. For example, see: David Easton, *A Systems Analysis of Political Life*, New York, Wiley, 1965; Karl W. Deutsch, *The Nerves of Government*, New York, Free Press, 1966; Robert Merton, *Social Theory, Social Structure*, Glencoe, IL, Free Press, 1957; Jacques Derrida, *Positions*, Alan Bates, trans., Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1981; Mancur Olson, *The Logic of Collective Action*, New York, Schocken, 1968; Anthony Downs, *An Economic Theory of Democracy*, New York, Harper and Row, 1957; John Seeley, *The Americanization of the Unconscious*, New York, International Science Press, 1967; Norwood Russell Hanson, *Patterns of Discovery*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1961; Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, Ronald Gregor Smith, trans., New York, Scribner's, second edition, 1958; Paul F. Kress, "Political Studies: The Alchemic Analogue," *Through the Looking Glass*, Maria J. Falco, ed., Washington, DC, University Press of America, 1979, 152-176.
2. Cf. Hannah Arendt, "Lying in Politics," *Crises of the Republic*, New York, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1972, 1-47.
3. I have sketched this argument elsewhere: "Politics and Science: A Contemporary View of an Ancient Association," *Polity*, 2, 1, Fall, 1969, 1-13. Cf. Hannah Arendt, *The Life of the Mind, Volume One: Thinking*, New York, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1977.
4. Ronnie Dugger, *The Politician*, New York, Norton, 1982, 382, 385.
5. Especially cf. Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, Boston, Beacon Press, 1964.
6. Gunnell himself notes that there may be something in the idea and practices of constitutionalism that inhibits heroic action and epic theory. This may be the case because that tradition, at least in the past two centuries of Anglo-American history, has legitimated the idea of interest. It may be that governance by rules and not men suggests too much the routine and (again the Platonic legacy) second-rate bourgeois comfort, the absence of challenge, because it gives public matters over too exclusively to lawyers and judges. Or there may be other reasons entirely. For a related argument, cf. Kirk Thompson, "Constitutional Theory and Political Practice," *Journal of Politics*, 31, 3, August, 1969, 655-681.
7. See: Wilson Carey McWilliams, *The Idea of Fraternity in America*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1973; Mason Drukman, *Community and Purpose in America*, New York, McGraw-Hill, 1971.

8. Fernand Toennies, *Community and Society*, Charles P. Loomis, ed. and trans., New York, Harper and Row, 1957.
9. Yet to receive the attention it merits is Richard Bernstein's *Praxis and Action*, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1971.
10. Cf. Paul F. Kress, "Political Theorizing in the Late Twentieth Century: Foci, Loci, and Agendas," *What Should Political Theory Be Now?*, John S. Nelson, ed., Albany, State University of New York Press, 1983, 103-126.
11. See: PT.
12. For example, see: Fred R. Dallmayr, *Beyond Dogma and Despair*, Notre Dame, IN, University of Notre Dame Press, 1981, especially chapter 7.
13. Taylor Branch, "America's Errant Philosopher," *Washington Monthly*, 15, 2, April, 1983, 48-57, on 54. There Branch also claims that "dominant American philosophers privately laugh at Nozick and Rawls for going beyond the boundaries of the equations in the first place, into substantive areas where they might be contradicted.
14. The literature on deconstruction is burgeoning but currently manageable—in part because, at least in English, it has focused on literary criticism. If it follows the pattern of its older sibling, structuralism, it will soon invade virtually all of the humanities and most of the social sciences. At present in the United States, the premier bastion of deconstruction is the "Yale School" of criticism, most notably: Harold Bloom, Paul de Man, Geoffrey Hartman, and J. Hillis Miller. Two recent introductions to the "movement" are: Jonathan Culler, *On Deconstruction*, Ithaca, NY, Cornell University Press, 1982; Christopher Norris, *Deconstruction*, London, Methuen, 1982.
15. The interpretive dispute regarding historical texts or the "role of the historian" forms a chapter of Gunnell's *Political Theory* and is adumbrated by the exchange between Gunnell and J.G.A. Pocock: Pocock, "Political Theory, History and Myth: A Salute to John Gunnell," *Annals of Scholarship*, 1, 4, Fall, 1980, 3-25; MMST; Pocock, "Intentions, Traditions and Methods: Sounds on a Fog-Horn," 57-62. The exchange deals with the contrast between the position of Hans-Georg Gadamer and that of John Dunn, Quentin Skinner, and Pocock; but they do not address deconstruction.
16. Robert Alter, "Deconstruction in America," *New Republic*, April 25, 1983, 27-32, on 32. Cf. Denis Donoghue, *Ferocious Alphabets*, Boston, Little, Brown, 1982.
17. The gloss may be otiose if we recall that Machiavelli's counsel was intended for the new (usurper?) prince and not for the heir to an established line.
18. One is reminded of David Truman's discussion of the "defensive advantage" in *The Governmental Process*, New York, Knopf, 1950.
19. Cf. Erich Kahler, *The Tower and the Abyss*, New York, Braziller, 1959. I have previously explored the political implications of some of these developments: "Self,

System, and Significance: Reflections on Professor Easton's Political Science," *Ethics*, 77, 1, October, 1966, 1-13; "Against Epistemology: Apostate Musings," *Journal of Politics*, 41, 2, May, 1979, 526-542.

20. Cf. Kress, "Political Theorizing in the Late Twentieth Century."

21. Edward B. Portis, "Max Weber and the Unity of Normative and Empirical Theory," *Political Studies*, 31, 1, March, 1983, 25-42, on 32.

22. The decision of the University of Maryland to withdraw an offer to Bertell Ollman is a recent example.

23. At least one possible exception might be noted: that of a group of young political economists who studied at Harvard almost fifteen years ago. Writing of this cohort, John Kenneth Galbraith observes: "At Harvard a little more than a decade ago, an interesting group of young economists set out first to master the apparatus of mainstream economics and its techniques, and then to bring a relentless critical judgment to bear on it. All were called radicals; some were described as Marxists, theirs being, in fact, a faith that Marx almost certainly would not have recognized." ("The Wealth of the Nation," *New York Review of Books*, 30, 9, June 2, 1983, 3-6, on 3.) On the differences between political science or theory and economics, see Kress, "Political Theorizing in the Late Twentieth Century." These differences should not entirely obscure the writing of critical monographs and textbooks by such political theorists or scientists as Michael Parenti and Alan Wolfe. Nonetheless, I think that my point in the text is valid.

24. There is the further problem that "realized" humanity (presumably in the historically achieved society of communism) would find its "essence" as producer transformed. Cf. Kahler, *The Tower and the Abyss*; Kress, "Self, System, and Significance."

25. The writings of some Marxists on this point provide uncomfortable parallels to the early Christian doctrine of the "suffering generation," an idea inspired less by scripture than by the need to explain the unaccountable delay of the second coming.

26. Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, Boston, Beacon Press, 1955.

27. MMST, 31-32, emphasis added. One is reminded of a criticism of Peter Winch's *The Idea of a Social Science*, New York, Humanities Press, 1958: that his account of social explanation proposed reading linguistic and physical acts as "codes."

28. Edward Said, "An Organic Intellectual," *New Republic*, April 18, 1983, 30-33, on 32.

29. *Ibid.* This diagnosis provides a striking parallel to Marcuse's despairing conclusion to *One-Dimensional Man*.

30. Quoted in *ibid.* Cf. Larry Spence, *The Politics of Social Knowledge*, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1978.

31. Cf. Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, E. B. Ashton, trans., New York, Seabury Press, 1973.

32. Cf. Deborah Baumgold, "Political Commentary on the History of Political Theory," *American Political Science Review*, 75, 4, December, 1981, 928-940. This article and a few others suggest that the writing of the interpretive history of political theories can yield knowledge of another or further kind than the "purely" historical, thus constituting political "commentary." The suggestion requires much more elaboration than it has yet received.

33. Kress, "Against Epistemology." Indeed, if Arendt's sense of politics as centrally involving acts of speaking and hearing were accepted, then some forms of textualism would appear to threaten the enterprise in its "normal" as well as critical practice. Even as committed a critic as Jürgen Habermas has written substantially of "disordered communication" and "communicative competence." (Toward a Theory of Communicative Competence," *Recent Sociology* No. 2, Hans Peter Dreitzel, ed., New York, Macmillan, 1970, 115-148.) Perhaps we have travelled full circle to Thomas Hobbes and his project of creating linguistic community while establishing sovereign power.

34. MMST, 45.

35. Of course, Kuhn does not employ and likely would not be sympathetic to this dichotomy drawn during the late nineteenth century *Methodenstreit*. But it needs to be remembered that Kuhn himself credits his experience with social scientists for the generation of his idea of paradigms, which he then "read back" into the history of natural science.

CHAPTER IX

Time, Historicity, and Political Theory: John Gunnell's "Detour" in Postmodern Perspective

HERBERT G. REID

Political theorists may be evaluated by what they have not written, what they have started yet left unfinished, the roads not taken, the trails begun but then deserted—returning to weeds or wilderness. Sometimes we should search these vacated stretches of philosophical forest to seek the boundaries of a theorist's initial explorations.

Those who have read John Gunnell's work over the last fifteen years should know that it neither builds upon nor takes its main bearings from the philosophical dialogues inspired by Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger. Nor does it develop any of the "critical" themes of the Frankfurt School. It provides a massive and often penetrating critique of the philosophical presuppositions, claims, and pretensions of American political science. But for the most part, it follows an Anglo-American path of philosophical analysis, taking little from the living legacy of Hegel, Marx, Husserl, and Heidegger. There is one partial exception: the enduring influence of one or two perspectives from the work of Alfred Schutz. Yet not even that has led Gunnell down the phenomenological paths which his early work might have projected but which his later work definitely does miss.

Its many merits notwithstanding, Gunnell's work has managed to lose track of phenomenology, Marxism, and even existentialism. How this has happened and at what cost are worth considering, not only for lessons about Gunnell's work, but also for corrections of much work by his contemporaries. The abandoned territory that particularly interests me is the critique of time or history in recent politics and theory. But when

recovered, this ground turns out to be enormous in both expanse and significance.

I

Previous essays in this volume address Gunnell's work as though it were closely connected to the philosophies of historicity produced by Martin Heidegger and his disciple, Hans-Georg Gadamer. But as Gunnell explicitly notes, Gadamer's theory is utilized only narrowly in Gunnell's 1979 book on *Political Theory: Tradition and Interpretation*. Nor is Heidegger's philosophy a hovering presence in the previous decade of Gunnell's work. None of that work is presented as hermeneutical phenomenology or phenomenological Marxism; none emphasizes problematics of historicity and *praxis*. Such themes don't play well either in Peoria or the pages of *The American Political Science Review*. This is not to suggest that Gunnell has shed earlier philosophical armor in favor of more homespun protection in battling behavioral sciences of politics, but rather to insist that he never fully donned such alien attire in the first place.

John Nelson's critical overview of Gunnell's philosophical orientation opens with the discerning comment that Gunnell "evokes an antitranscendental existentialism; but he roots it in an objectivist ontology of action."¹ Emphasizing the interplay between these orientations in Gunnell's work is important, even though "existentialism" has had a largely residual function in his work since 1970. For understanding the treatment of Heidegger in Gunnell's pre-1970 dissertation project and first book, this point is crucial. I refer specifically to the book's last chapter, especially to the section "Time and the Tradition."²

In some respects, Gunnell's presentation of Heidegger is masterful. Still, the result is an existentialist conception of that work and its import. Heidegger rejected "existentialism" as a label for his work. Nevertheless, it is repeatedly misunderstood to espouse existentialism—a modern subjectivist humanism. Gunnell's account and Nelson's commentary indicate awareness of Heidegger's determination to "transcend modern subjectivism," but this is not substantiated in their internal reconstructions of Heidegger's perspective on time and Being.

The interpretative theme of "existentialism" is immediately evident in the treatment of Heidegger in the last three pages of Gunnell's first book, *Political Philosophy and Time*. For Gunnell, the "symbolization of man as a historical animal" attains a sort of ontological culmination in Heidegger's thought.³ Werner Marx and others have shown the centrality to Heidegger of the problem of Being. Gunnell's own sensitivity to this theme appears

in his quotation *What Is Philosophy?*, where Heidegger clarified the "destruction" or overcoming of Western metaphysics in regard to the question of Being.

But Gunnell interprets Heidegger's concern with the loss of rootedness that arises from the spirit of the age in terms of a "derailment of the historical consciousness into the vision of contextual man." Gunnell overlooks that Heidegger did not accept the prevailing form of "historical consciousness" of the modern age. He attributes to Heidegger the view that "history is a function of man." In the book's last paragraph, he links Heidegger to Plato, stating that now "it is history and society writ small that symbolize *Dasein*." "Plato, faced with the crisis of man in a decaying political order, turned inward and sought in the soul the ground of order and disorder; Heidegger, faced with the crisis of man in historical existence, has also turned inward and sought for the meaning of historicity in man himself."⁴ This sets Heidegger's thought back within the modern representational frames of a subjectivist humanism.

One of Heidegger's key contributions to recent thought is his discussion of what I term the dialectic of subjectivism and objectivism. (A source is his 1938 essay on the modern view of the world-as-picture.) For those advancing the critique of objectivism in political science, Heidegger's insistence on its interplay with subjectivism is fundamental. Heidegger argued that the process by which the world is projected or understood as a picture "is one and the same process with that by which man, within the existent becomes a *subjectum*."⁵ Heidegger did not combat "technological" objectivism with a philosophy of historicity founded on modern subjectivism. Instead, he illuminated the subjectivist underside to the objectivist projects of our age. This unfolds in the form of modern metaphysical claims of man to a self-grounding. Human rootedness is threatened by the multiple ideological and institutional modes through which our society expresses the technological world-picture's dualism of subject and object. As Maurice Merleau-Ponty said in his lectures at the College de France, for Heidegger there "was never any question of reducing being to time, but of approaching being through time."

Heidegger and Husserl required a radical way of "thinking the experience which underlies metaphysics," the "preobjective Being . . . that is the proper theme of philosophy."⁶ In discussing Heidegger's seminal essay on "The Question Concerning Technology," Werner Marx summarizes the argument:

Man for once stands in peril of completely forgetting that he alone is essentially singled out to experience the meaning of Being, that he alone can respond to this meaning and therefore plays a definite role in the occurrence of Being . . . Man

stands in danger of comprehending himself only as a material, as stock. (Conversely, man) at the same time finds himself in a second and even greater danger: that he takes himself as the sole lord of the universe, believing that everything he encounters subsists only insofar as it is of his "making."⁷

What is expressed in the modern interplay of objectivism and subjectivism if not man's "world-alienation"?

Nelson wants to "reconstruct" Gunnell's long-term critical project "as a mode of postmodern mythmaking for politics and political inquiry." On what grounds does he consider Gunnell's project or perspective "post-modern?" Leaning heavily on Gunnell's quotation of Heidegger on "destruction," Nelson reads Gunnell's subsequent work as carrying through "something on the order of a Heideggerian deconstruction of recent political inquiry." Nelson finds a model for Gunnell's critical work in Heidegger: "The West must be destroyed (by Heidegger and company) to save it from its nihilistic self." He finds in Gunnell's work "strategies and tactics (that) are surprisingly Heideggerian." Further, Nelson reads both thinkers as undertaking little construction of their own. He says that their failure to be constructive is due to their "alienation"—Heidegger's from the world and Gunnell's from theory and politics. Thus, Heidegger fails to restore ontology, and Gunnell fails to provide a substantive theory of action.⁸

But Heidegger's philosophy is postmodern in a fundamental sense that Gunnell's is not. Nelson seems to share Gunnell's basic view of Heidegger yet rejects what Gunnell accepts. I have contended that, in his earliest work, Gunnell fails to come to grips with Heidegger. In a 1970 contribution to a volume on *Temporal Dimensions of Development Administration*, Gunnell falls into a dualistic view of time strikingly akin to that of Alfred Schutz. Nelson neglects to ask why, after 1970, the problematic of time almost completely disappears from Gunnell's published work. Nor does Nelson address in detail Heidegger's follower, Gadamer, despite Gunnell's "use" of Gadamer in the 1979 book and Gadamer's concern for the very themes of myth, tradition, and rhetoric promoted by Nelson.⁹ If Heidegger's philosophy were so "alienated" and "destructive," Nelson might have difficulty in explaining Gadamer's constructive contributions in these areas.

II

The "hermeneutical situation" of political theorists and social scientists advanced by Gadamer (out of Heidegger) is not reflected significantly in Gunnell's account of recent political theory. Not even in his earliest publications has Gunnell situated himself as a political theorist in terms of

hermeneutical phenomenology. An existentialist-individualist idea of "subjective time" tends to be one more category in Gunnell's thoughtful catalogue of time concepts. Compared to other efforts in political science, Gunnell's essay on "Development, Social Change, and Time" shines like a lighthouse in a dark sea of conceptual confusion and reification.¹⁰ Nevertheless, in retrospect, his conception of political theory fails to secure the postmodern connection of understanding to ontology evoked by Richard Palmer: "The modern tendency is to accord understanding no particular ontological status, to regard it as a mental game with no reference to one's concrete, historical existence; the postmodern view affirms that interpreting is in itself an existential process."¹¹ As Palmer warns, the "existential process" must not be subjectivized. Hence Heidegger's approach "is based not on the way that the world belongs to a human subject but on the way in which the human subject belongs to the world."¹²

Gunnell has not pursued the problem of historicity as far with Heidegger as Nelson thinks or as far with Gadamer as Pocock suspects. Accordingly, it is the Platonic model of the theorist that hovers over the last chapter of Gunnell's *Political Theory*. On crucial themes of time, history, social science, objectivity, and action, he moves among Plato, Schutz, Weber, and recent Anglo-American analytical philosophies of language. Neither ontological nor political radicalism interest Gunnell much. Ira Strauber astutely dubs Gunnell's "action theory" the "science of resigned aristocracy," rightly highlighting its Weberian aura of metaphysical pathos.¹³

The 1979 book provides abundant evidence of Gunnell's underlying distaste for the legacies of both Heidegger and Marx. In Chapter V, Gunnell beats a retreat from historicity. Curiously, he moves back into mythical aspects of "the tradition," while treating Plato's work as fully representative of "the characteristics of political theory as an ideal type."¹⁴ In Gunnell's image of the theorist, detachment and exclusion from participation are portrayed as synonymous. A careful reading reveals that Gunnell follows Plato in viewing the political theorist as an artist who confronts the "recalcitrant character of political matter," determined to sculpt it into a new form.¹⁵ In taking attempts to escape from nature into history and to transcend historical time through an ideal order as typical of Western theory, Gunnell appears to fall back into the "myth of the tradition." Not Heidegger's "world-alienation" but the West's, which his student Hannah Arendt identified as Max Weber's great discovery,¹⁶ leads Gunnell into Weber's iron cage. Weber and Gunnell "share a sensibility of political decline," as Strauber indicates.

Similarly, Gunnell's notion of the "open society" is in the tradition of liberal ideology, although he mistakes it for mere sociological discription.¹⁷ In analyzing our "bureaucratic society of controlled consumption," Henri

Lefebvre's *Everyday Life in the Modern World* is much more descriptive.¹⁸ The loss of identity of the public realm has much more to do with the corporate state than with the liberal pluralist ideology of the "open society." Nor is Gunnell's misuse of the term compensated by the admission that it does not "transcend ideology." Gunnell is quite right that every theorist is obsessed with the distance between power and knowledge. But it does not follow that the theorist must make public knowledge of power more palatable with linguistic games.

The subtle irony that Strauber senses in Gunnell's "open society" begins to fade when we pose seriously the question of the theorist's public responsibility. That responsibility has never inhered in the "public" positivistically rendered. The normative status of the "public sphere" is not reducible to a category of historical illusion, determined by conventional historiographical accounting. Gunnell truncates "historicity" by emphasizing only that of the "data." As Strauber suggests, therefore, Gunnell may manifest the nihilistic tendency to dismiss the questions of responsibility as an illusion. In any event, he appears to leave no way of taking this issue seriously.

The issue is not tied to whether academic political theory suffers a "myth of tradition." Whatever the case, political theory is not helped by an academic myth of the "formlessness of the open society." In fact, this is an ideological image of late bourgeois-liberal society. Although Gunnell is deeply concerned with the alienation of political theory from substantive inquiry and actual practice, he "seldom writes directly about politics," as Nelson bluntly reminds us. Nor has Gunnell's criticism of mainstream political science included sustained attention to its historical context in American political culture. Nor does it include historical attention to liberal ideology in our very American social sciences.

The "open society" is an intellectual alibi for failure to come to grips with the ideological and historical dynamics of advanced capitalist society. What Strauber reads as subtle irony is related to the "subtle positivism" of Gunnell's "action theory," which aims to embrace "the givenness of social phenomena." Only by identifying the phenomenology of the *Lebenswelt* with a one-levelled, "common sense" account of everyday life is Strauber able to write of a "phenomenological positivism" in Gunnell's theory of "action as immanent in the preconstituted realm of ordinary experience." This is "phenomenology" only if Gunnell's development of a narrow version of Schutz's work is denied context in the rich and varied tradition of phenomenological research.¹⁹

Strauber's interpretation of parallels between Gunnell's perspectives and some of the more philosophical aspects of Weber's work needs to be supplemented by attention to Gunnell's reliance, in early writings, on

formulations from Alfred Schutz. Not only for Gunnell, but also for American social scientists who reduce phenomenology to ethnomethodological empiricism, Schutz is the crucial mediating figure. To be sure, Schutz's influence is not exhausted by this trend. On the contrary, his descriptive phenomenology of the natural attitude in everyday life provides a remarkably rich "geography" of life-world terrains. But the question is how we can and do understand the *Lebenswelt's* "geological" levels. (These terms come respectively from Thomas Luckmann²⁰ and Merleau-Ponty²¹.)

In the working notes for his last studies, Merleau-Ponty spoke of "grasping the *nexus* . . . of history and transcendental geology" as the key for opening up a genuine phenomenology of the life-world, with its universal and historical structures.²² From Husserl, Schutz derived the brilliant formulation of the problem of meaning as a problem of time.²³ Yet Schutz himself failed to move into the milieu of a new ontological perspective—the postmodern understanding advanced along different routes by Merleau-Ponty and Gadamer. In Schutz's thought, the time dimension remains bound to the dualism of the modern age. As Fred Dallmayr has recognized, Schutz's explorations "invariably took one premise for granted without question: the essentially subjective character of mundane experience both in a private and a social frame of reference." Schutz "depicted man's 'natural' condition as incipiently egological and the 'life-world' as an environmental context 'surrounding' individual human designs."²⁴

Concluding his 1932 study, Schutz expressed his hopes for Husserl's investigations into the problem of intersubjectivity. Yet appropriately, Max Weber received the last word. For Schutz erected his interpretive sociology on Weber's methodological individualism. Thus Schutz never overcame the problems of psychologism and sociologism (subjectivism and objectivism) that have generated so many analyses in recent decades. Schutz continued to hold that the social scientist can understand man "only as a personal ideal type without duration and spontaneity." As critics and followers alike have noted, personal ideal types are puppets activated by "thought experiments," with the social scientist as puppet master. As Schutz wrote in 1932, "they can understand him only as existing within an impersonal and anonymous objective time which no one ever has, or even can, experience."²⁵ Of most interest here is the picture of the theorist as disinterested observer in the politics of time.

By authoring *The Structures of the Life-World* on the basis of his mentor's outline, Luckmann analyzes Schutz's theme of the common sense world as social reality. In discussing Schutz's plan for the project, Luckmann identifies "The Life-World of the Natural Attitude" as the focus of analysis. In this attitude of everyday activity, the intersubjectivity of the life-world is taken for granted. Schutz's difficulties with Husserl's treatments of the

phenomenological problem of the constitution of intersubjectivity" are well-known. Turning away from Husserl's problematic, Schutz fixed on the world of daily life, with its natural attitude of "common sense," as the archetype of our experience of reality.

In this context, the ontological question is whether Schutz fell back on the well-established German tradition of individualistic idealism. In his 1932 "phenomenology of the social world," Schutz observed that all "action takes place in time, or more precisely in the internal time-consciousness"—a reading of the early Husserl.²⁶ The point is *not* to argue with Schutz's later assessment of how far or how successfully Husserl travelled from Cartesian egology. Rather the question is whether responding negatively to Husserl's final efforts did not land Schutz in greater difficulties. When, following Schutz, social science accepts the unproblematic "intersubjectivity" of the everyday life-world as a categorical given, does it not risk greater troubles? For does it not then reproduce an ontological dualism between nature and history? It is the dualism assumed in "common sense," although really founded upon deeper but occluded structures of time for being-in-the-world.

As Arthur Parsons has shown, this dichotomy between life and thought (object and subject) is central to the social theory of Schutz and some of his followers.²⁷ They ignore phenomenology's ontological contribution to illuminating the social world, adopting instead a neo-Kantian orientation to epistemology as the base for social research. This orientation underlies the theory of symbolic forms in Gunnell's first book and his subsequent article on time. The article argues that "understanding social change is merely one aspect of understanding the relation between social action and the symbolic transformation of experience."²⁸ In the latter domain, Gunnell emphasizes the role of "temporal images"—"an essential aspect of any explanation of social change on the level of meaningful action."²⁹ Such action is conceived in the dualistic terms illustrated by a quotation from Schutz: "the individual defines his world from his own perspective (although) he is nevertheless a social being, rooted in intersubjective reality."³⁰ In Gunnell's omniscient survey approach, the "affirmation of the primacy of human, experienced, or 'lived' time" has something to do with existentialism's chapter in the history of philosophy.³¹ His categorical treatment of time imagery, while useful heuristically, fails to penetrate to the fundamental level of political theory where the challenge of historicity is encountered.

Relatedly, Gunnell's address of "Phenomenology and Political Science" in Maurice Natanson's two-volume collection on *Phenomenology and the Social Sciences* in no way attempts either an account of the historical context of political studies *and* the phenomenological movement or an example of

a phenomenological approach grounded in the philosophical tradition. Instead, the "primary concern" of Gunnell's "phenomenological analysis" is to investigate "certain areas of contemporary analytic and linguistic philosophy."³² For the most part, these are the intellectual origins of Gunnell's philosophical critique of political science. Its chief source in phenomenology is Schutz's "conception of social science as a second-order enterprise," which Gunnell believes to agree significantly with those of individuals such as Peter Winch.

This conception "requires a view of social reality as a realm of action that is to be described and explained principally by an illumination of the rules and conceptual structure which inform it."³³ Consistently for fifteen years, this theme from Schutz has been the touchstone of Gunnell's idea of social science as second-order analysis. The influence of Schutz—not Husserl, Heidegger, or Gadamer—is the basis for Nelson's point that Gunnell suffers his own "myth of the given." To construe "the fact-filled natural attitude" so as to bracket ontology "in favor of a covertly naturalist kind of conventionalism" derives from the phenomenology of Schutz. This is the ground of Gunnell's devastating critique of the philosophy of political science. Apparently, his critique intends to help the "political scientist . . . face the theoretical problem of elucidating the concept of social reality."³⁴ But I contend that Gunnell should shoulder some of the blame for the fact that the "alienation of theory in political science" remains conspicuous, because his approach to *resituating the political theorist* is incomplete.

III

As Richard Ashcraft and others try to show, the problem of social reality is not merely "theoretical."³⁵ The next-to-last chapter of Gunnell's 1979 book, as he put it in 1980, discusses "Gadamer as an example of a competing philosophical position . . . and did not want to validate his work as either a philosophy or a norm"³⁶ The last chapter makes clear his narrowly academic approach to the so-called Gadamerian "paradigm of historicity." His exchange with Pocock identifies its "thrust" as suggesting "how (the classic texts) could be construed as a corpus without a framework of traditions of any sort."³⁷ This (mis)understanding of Gadamer comes from the very critic of "the myth of the tradition" who enlists Gadamer's "notion that an interpreter always stands within a tradition of effective history" and the scholarly values of a more productive "openness toward the past."³⁸ The Enlightenment, with its modernist attitude toward tradition and its representational perspective on history, remains effective with Gunnell's work.

Not surprisingly, Gunnell allows Pocock to call his bluff.³⁹ Instead of demonstrating the superficiality of Pocock's straw notion of Gadamer's interpretation of texts as "independent of historical data," Gunnell merely reaffirms that Pocock and company have been insufficiently concerned with clarifying "some of their assumptions and arguments." The debate with the "Gadamerian" theory of interpretation which Gunnell initially promoted is bypassed; Pocock simply refuses to reconsider Gadamer's conception of historical inquiry. The Anglo-American dedication to Reality prevails against the German metaphysical bugaboo: "pseudohistory" is driven back into the dark, Teutonic woods of philosophical speculation.

From those mysterious woods, despite Gunnell's neglect, Gadamer has provided a fearless and convincing account of Heidegger's contribution.

For Heidegger, the fact that we can only speak of history insofar as we are ourselves historical, signifies that it is the historicity of human *Dasein*, in its incessant movement of anticipation and forgetfulness, which is the pre-condition of our ability to revive the past. What before appeared as prejudicial to the concept of science and method, as only a "subjective" approach to historical knowledge, today is placed in the foreground of fundamental inquiry.⁴⁰

As Gadamer writes elsewhere, "It is obvious that an historical fact is not, in the first place, merely something that really happened, but rather, something that really happened in such a way that it has special signification for an historical question, an historical context."⁴¹ Historical facts are identifiable in the light of historical questions. These evoke human historicity past and present; they enable us to recognize the "facts" and to reorganize their historical structure and significance, insofar as this seems necessary from the politics of experience. Indeed, traditions serve our historicity when participation rather than historical mastery defines our mode of being in the politics of the life-world. This means that we must find "the forms in which our reasoning is embedded in our own lines of life, of past, of historical memory, and so on."⁴² Instead of identifying its preconditions as "neutral objectifications," theorizing undertakes its work from "articulations of pre-given and lived patterns of social life."⁴³

What is the world with which political theorists are concerned? Where is it? It is a world of living history in which theorists find themselves. The political theorist's world has the being of a project, although here we do not mean the world mathematically projected by natural science. The fundamental meanings of the mathematical projections of science depends upon their contextualization in the projects of the life-world.⁴⁴ When theorists decline to engage the life-world as a historical project, the meaning of science and technology is determined by the ideas and values of the

powerful rather than by powerful ideas and values, resonating with broader human concerns and aspirations. Political theory is losing its capacity to resonate with that existential unity of man, the source of which Husserl, Heidegger, and Merleau-Ponty identified in temporality as a formative *praxis* mixing facticity and spontaneity. Historicity is the intrinsic tie between history and time: the bond of time in ourselves and of ourselves in time.

Gunnell's brilliant critique of the alienation of theory in American political science should be extended to a critique of the reification of time. For it is theory's alibi for refusing to participate deliberately in real, multi-dimensional, historical time. So-called behavioralists and historians feed at the common trough of reified time. The former treat "behavior" as an ahistorical object, the latter regard the "past" as a reified object. Both pretend to remove themselves from the world of living history in the interest of serving an ideal "objectivity." Such a division of labor, which also entails a dichotomization of private and public, effectively puts knowledge at the service of the commodification process.

When hermeneutical alienation of theory proceeds so far as to capitulate to reified time, theorists evade responsibility to the public sphere—the sociohistorical project or institution guiding their vocation. Gunnell fails to clarify this because he fails to understand or at least to engage the problem of reification in its generality. His astute criticisms of the "philosophical alienation theory" need grounding in a general theory of cultural reification. In *Political Theory*, Gunnell asserted that Critical Theory "is not the answer to the problem of the poverty of theory in social science."⁴⁵ This may be so, but Gunnell's theory could benefit from critical attention to the Frankfurt School's studies of reification in late-bourgeois society.

Despite a tendency to reify the concept of reification, the Frankfurt School instructively contrasted instrumental rationality and dialectical thinking as modes of intellectual endeavor.⁴⁶ Several years ago, I examined this dialectical theory in terms of a critical phenomenology of the life-world which reveals the "inter-corporeal preconstitution" of "convincing objects" in primary perceptual forms composing the life-world's deeper structures.

Unfortunately, the Frankfurt theory of subjectivity is intellectualistic and fails to bring what Theodor Adorno termed "the element of otherness in dialectics" into focus as a dynamic theme of the life-world. Grounded in a truncated notion of subjectivity, the pessimism of Adorno and Max Horkheimer about man leads to the postulation of an "objective" basis for resistance to reification accessible only to the intellectual elite of Critical Theory. However, the life-world comprehended in a nonsubjectivist approach to subjectivity opens up Adorno's "element of otherness" as the outer dimension of temporal form flowing beyond us toward a universe of inexhaustible mystery.⁴⁷

As long as reflection is dominated by the liberal ideal of self-enclosed subjectivity, there will remain something scandalous about this human state of affairs. Edmund Burke's sense of a historical web of generations as an "organic" response to time is far more adequate than the bourgeois-liberal instrumentalism that would "save time" by reducing existence itself to clockwork. The organic flow of time must not be symbolically encapsulated as a merely negative Other to be "mastered" or "manipulated." In the temporal sea of existence, human freedom also finds the forms of primordial mediation essential for tolerable social life and humane social change.⁴⁸

Therefore, *praxis* must be understood as a concept/form of history as lived: when it fails to take root in time's body, political miscarriages result. Indeed, they abound in our technocratic era. Political theorists are some of history's matchmakers who, by virtue of historicity, must also attend the midwives of politics as they bring hope and despair into the world. Theory is the hopeful search through knowledge of time for intimations of forms of *praxis* to blend social space and cultural temporality, extending the gift of life while cultivating care for the world sustaining it.

This points to my path for reconstructing Nelson's critical observation that "Gunnell wields metatheory against metatheory to stop the spreading mesmerization of political science by methodology but executes a project of deconstruction that lapses into simple destruction due to inadequate seeding of the *auspices* for the creative movement of his theory."⁴⁹ Nelson is right that "history and theory need one another, especially in the study and practice of politics."⁵⁰ But Gunnell's troubles in this respect are not due to Heidegger, as Gadamer's fruitful development of Heideggerian themes has made clear.

In Gunnell's early work, some of these themes are picked up but then dropped as his work begins a long detour. Not even the 1979 use of Gadamerian historicity to probe the soft spots of historiographical objectivism has brought that detour to an end. At the same time Gunnell was beginning his detour, Gadamer was making a case for connecting "the moral impulse that lies at the basis of Husserl's idea of a new kind of life-world *praxis* . . . with the old impulse of an authentic practical and political common sense."⁵¹ In this context, the task of political theory is to show the significance of the "details of everyday research" through theoretical elaboration of the tension between essential structures of the life-world and conventional patterns of everyday life, providing perspective on a dynamic and contradictory totality.

IV

The human body itself may be considered such a totality: a microcosm of society. The human body's structuration as a dynamic totality (rather

than as mere spatial juxtaposition) is rooted in a complex dialectic of temporal forms. As Joseph Gabel says, we live more in time than in space.⁵² We live historically. Different types of habitation are marked by varying degrees of historicity. The disorganizing of communities for collective, democratic action and the alienation of people from work both involve a spatialization of time, through reduction of meaning and symbolic possibilities. This is conspicuous in company towns but also evident elsewhere. In such contexts, experience promotes the ahistoricity of reified consciousness. "As a prisoner of a universe where space takes the place of duration, man in the reified world cannot understand history as the expression of creativity and spontaneity."⁵³

The commoditization of social and political life and the cultural reification entailed is not a process that exposes only "masses" and exempts "elites." Out of an empiricist disdain for "normative" problems of democracy, pluralist theorists often idealize formal capacities of action. Hence some assume that reification affects our Archie Bunkers but not their political and economic heroes. As Michel Foucault notes, however, "Time penetrates the body and with it all the meticulous controls of power."⁵⁴ Thus, when read in terms of phenomenological psychiatry, Georg Lukac's problematic of reification may be a theoretical foundation for insights into market personalities such as Richard Nixon. This would hold as much for the performative insights of comedian David Frye as for the intellective insights of scholar Garry Wills.⁵⁵ In fact, our advanced capitalist society may be epitomized by a politics of commodity selves vying for position and power in the last competitive market left. As Robert Goodman has demonstrated,⁵⁶ the "last entrepreneurs" in this market subsystem are the state and local governments which, today, tend to be second-rate enterprises tended anxiously by beggar-politicians. Sadly, our universities also merit this description.

When the public sphere is subordinated to imperatives of corporate capitalism, especially as in recent years, reification proceeds at the expense of the forms of historicity which generate action. Perhaps paradoxically, public space expands essentially through temporalization. Spatialization reduces the space for public action. The political cultivation to time seeds public space, opens it up for harvests of collective action.⁵⁷ Grounded in the dichotomous logic of modern representational thought, a physicalistic view of public space is antipolitical and antitemporal. Alienation of theorist from world and instrumentalization of rationality are integral to such images. Mainstream political science, which abounds with them, more often than not reinforces authoritarian elitism, at least indirectly. How to overcome ontological dualism by critical and hermeneutical phenomenology is yet to be learned.

Cues for a strategy of democratic change are contained in the dialectical relationship of object and subject in the field of historical action, with its limited possibilities. The cultural objects encountered in everyday life and politics exist in the temporally constituted modes of social relations among actors (subjects). Coactivating their different levels of meaning, these actors reveal the historicity binding subject and object, self and world, temporal life-forms and structural totalities of the social world. The key measure of reification is the degree of passivity in the constituting role of the actors in the institutional field. When persons and publics are exposed to institutional imperatives favoring elites, the capacity for democratic action declines and commodity selves are produced.

In fact, reification is a process of commoditization—organizing, encouraging, and sustaining personal complicity in the loss of capabilities for rational, democratic action.⁵⁸ Updating Lukacs, Adorno put it this way in *Minima Moralis*: "What has become alien to men is the human component of culture, its closest part which upholds them against the world. They make common cause with the world against themselves and the most alienated condition of all, the omnipresence of commodities, their own conversion into appendages of machinery, is for them a mirage of closeness."⁵⁹

Critical political theory confronts the complicity of much social science in this state of affairs. The primary responsibility of political theorists is to a hermeneutics of the temporal forms of the body politic. These forms are existential structures of political experience. *Praxis* is a concept of history as lived, and theory is a form of historical *praxis* that puts theorists into the fight against the reification of time. The roots of *praxis* lie in time as humanly experienced. From this level, where history is primordially constituted, the forms of *praxis* are generated. Thus, the self is a more or less unified structure of interrelated time-forms emergent (though never wholly so) from a "cosmic matrix whose morphic aspects man himself expresses."⁶⁰

Our earliest perceptual relations with the natural world provide a paradigm for future growth and development. In fascinating studies, Edith Cobb detected and illuminated "a preverbal experience of an 'aesthetic logic' both in nature's formative process and in the gestalt-making powers of the child's own developing nervous system."⁶¹ What she described is the life-world logic, dynamically forming modalities of self-and-world in a temporal process of aesthetic experience. The physico-natural horizon highlighted by Cobb is complemented by the sociohistorical horizon of lived experience. Arising from this originary milieu of lived experience are the prescientific forms of essential life-world knowledge. They come to serve as the "meaning-fundament" of our special ways of thematizing and constituting the world. As Calvin Schrag says, "the natural sciences as much

as the social sciences have their origin in prescientific concerns and interests. The prescientifically given knowledge of the life-world continues to inform them both, and they both afford constituted thematic horizons of this life-world."⁶²

For some time, I have argued for repoliticizing the sciences along the path signalled by Michel de Certeau, who highlights the role of a new mode of historical understanding. Essentially, this repoliticizing means "historicizing historiography itself."⁶³ Serving the modern ideal of Objective Knowledge requires dichotomizing concepts of Subject and Object (Theorist and History). In turn, that entails reifying temporality and the past. We do not easily understand that history is a "strange object, an object which is ourselves," as Merleau-Ponty once wrote. The past "is ours and we are its."⁶⁴ Yet the source of our difficulty is not only or perhaps even primarily philosophical.

Using works by Lewis Mumford, E.P. Thompson, and others, I have explained how the commodification of time is the central historical process in the transformation of everyday life where capitalism has emerged. Moreover, I have tried to show how that process is a key contributor to the objectivism of mainstream social science in the United States. Ahistorical and uncritical in accepting the quantification of time as normative for relations between time and space, such social science ties studies of politics to the clockwork of industrial capitalism. Accordingly, it misses hermeneutical connections with the politics of time in modes deeper and more diverse.⁶⁵

Whether revolutionary, progressive, or reactionary in style, the modern Western intellectual's detachment from living, historical experience has become increasingly transparent as an alibi for serving deadly versions of knowledge. The fate of the earth described by Jonathan Schell and the crisis of the sciences probed by Husserl are inextricably linked. But it was Merleau-Ponty who understood how the problem is at once one of knowledge and action. He overcame the technicist reification of *praxis* by "Marxists." In so doing, he expanded our understanding of the tradition of *praxis* and its historical genesis of meaning. Thus, he illuminated the dialectics of our institutional context of knowledge as a form of human endeavor. The difficulties that American social scientists have with any conception of *praxis* relates to their impoverished notions of temporality and historicity.

V

In conclusion, perhaps I should provide an example of a contemporary theorist to contrast with Gunnell. It should be a theorist who centers

comprehension of social change and politics in advanced capitalism on historicity and historical action. There are problems with Alain Touraine's theorizing; but still it is fine work, superbly attuned to Merleau-Ponty and other major figures in twentieth-century philosophy. Here I focus on *The Self-Production of Society*.

Touraine's sociology of action differs sharply from Talcott Parsons's. It treats society less in terms of history alone than of *historicity*: a society's capacity to produce its own cultural field and historical environment. Historicity is composed of: a model of knowledge (which provides an image of society and nature), economic accumulation (which forms a surplus for work on work), and a cultural model (which projects an image of creativity and constitutes social recognition of the gap between historicity and functioning). Touraine's difficult and controversial notion of "society as historical subject" does not render it as an individual actor. This continues his long struggle with the complex problem of constituting historicity as a field of collective experience. A society's field of historicity is constituted in interdependent relations of the system of historical action and class relations. Not surprisingly, the system of historical action is organized around the cultural model, whereas class relations are more directly linked to accumulation.

Touraine seems exasperated by those who remain tangled in Protestant or liberal roots in reacting to his idea of a "historical subject." His key insight is that historicity "is two in one, at the same time the distance and the bond between society's production of itself and its functioning."⁶⁶ Partly due to scattered development, his argument is hard to follow. But the point seems to be that society's constitutional aspect does *not* culminate in an order of values. If so, it would be a mere agent of sedimented historicity. Instead, society (including postindustrial forms now emerging) remains "both the locus of domination and the mingling of present and past."⁶⁷ Hence it is unable to quiet the troubles of self-production. By such analysis, Touraine begins to open up the concept of society without destroying it, to paraphrase Merleau-Ponty.

In a passage that brings to mind Georges Gurvitch's great contribution to the social theory of the politics of time, Touraine writes that the "system of historical action is the field of action of the opposing classes striving to control it."⁶⁸ This system of social and cultural orientations links historicity and functioning. Its dimensions are outlined in oppositional categories: movement versus order, orientations versus resources, and culture versus society. Touraine's approach to historicity avoids cultural idealism, for his analysis of the system of historical action in the dialectic of class relations shows how historicity is always linked to a material situation. (Enzo Paci's contribution on this problem comes to mind.⁶⁹)

Nevertheless, the theory of action must not be reduced to the categories of class actors and their *praxis* (historicism). Touraine warns theorists that ideology "exorcizes historicity."⁷⁰ Instead, he urges faithful attention to the fundamental tension between historicity and functioning. Consequently, analysis of social movements should explore their fields of historical action more than the movements themselves. In particular, Touraine refuses to isolate class relations from a society's historicity—a problem long plaguing American Marxists. To be sure, his determination to transcend the "philosophy of the subject" may obscure the phenomenological grounds of his theory of action. Nonetheless, *The Self-Production of Society* illuminates problems of *praxis* based on history as lived. Indeed, political theorists who attempt to avoid subjectivist renderings of the *life-world* should learn much from Touraine.

In Gunnell's work, historicity is conspicuously impoverished as a theme in the light of his "field of historical action." By contrast, Touraine argues that historicity must be the central theme of critical social science, since it must grasp the production of society by society. He writes of historicity as the foundation of social structure but warns that it is neither an idea nor a material force. Historicity may not be reduced to a set of values—whether the liberal's "consensus" or the radical's "domination"—which merely reflect a historical order of society. For Touraine, man is both "nature and antinature," so that the sociology of historicity is neither idealist nor naturalist. Instead, it should confront the "double dialectic of the social classes."⁷¹ *"The central problem of sociology is to understand how a society rests upon a set of orientations while at the same time being directed and organized by power, how it is one and also double, historicity and class relations."*⁷²

Touraine tries to demonstrate that the dynamics of the system of historical action are best understood through class relations. In turn, their only adequate analysis is in connection with the system of historical action. A dialectical approach to totality, temporality, and *praxis* requires this recognition of both domination and its limits, plus the forms of opposition that the limits make possible. Dismissing Touraine, America's "radical" sociologists risk an opportunity to link studies of change and social structure more profoundly than before. Yet if they follow their usual route of reducing historicity to an ideological construct, they will merely preach about *praxis* in the face of the unacceptable alternatives (or complementary poles) of intellectualism and terrorism.

Far more productive would be intellectual and practical struggle with the following argument and its implications: "The analysis of change is not conceivable unless it starts from the constant noncoincidence that exists between a field of historicity and a concrete collectivity."⁷³ For example,

it is important to pursue this in regard to Touraine's chapter on "Class Relations," which begins:

Since society is the uprooting [upsurge] of historicity from social activity and the dominion of that historicity over society's practices, it is inevitable that this division of society from itself in the order of action also makes itself manifest in the order of the actors. Hence the constant existence of class relations that set a ruling class, serving historicity and also making use of it, against a popular class that resists this domination and contests the private appropriation of historicity.⁷⁴

Truly critical intellectuals do not succumb to rationalizations produced by opposing classes. Instead, they take account of a tendency delineated by Touraine: "The adversaries do not admit that it is their relation that is the carrier of meaning; they want the meaning to belong to them and their enemy to be cast out into nomening."⁷⁵ As Touraine puts it in *The Voice and the Eye*, "Our real objective is to enable a society to live at the highest possible level of historical action instead of blindly passing through crises and conflicts."⁷⁶ We are particularly concerned with historical forms for the mediation of the dilemma of structural constraint and practical action, forms expressive of historicity. The intellectual's role as guardian and catalyst of the historicity of these forms seems to correspond, however loosely, to Jürgen Habermas's liberatory program of nonrepressive, undistorted communication.⁷⁷ In this context, Gunnell's timidity in the face of Pocock's attack reinforces the role of conservative historiography in an academic *status quo* that continues to obscure the crucial problem of historical consciousness in political action.

Touraine understands historicity as the field and stake of class conflict. First, historicity is the "constitution of a field of collective experience."⁷⁸ Many years ago, Jean Domarchi said that "class consciousness is above all a consciousness of time."⁷⁹ The forms of class consciousness emerge and become effective in the temporally constituted field of collective experience. Second, "Historicity is the stake of class relations."⁸⁰ Either struggle sustains and extends class capacity for historical action, or repression and reification fragment and weaken it. The question is whether historicity will be appropriated for the private profit and purposes of the few or generated for the public service and participation of the many. These fundamental issues of *praxis* are crucial to the substantive theory of politics which Gunnell correctly insists that we need.

Political theorists need to understand *praxis* in terms of the dialectics of *totality* and *temporality*.⁸¹ Every historical totality moves toward hegemony by projecting structures of reified time. As a dimension of totality, time is subject to dissociation and reification. But preobjective temporality is the

more formative ground of *praxis*. The time of political theory is an enterprise of formative knowledge. It is pregnant with questions of the use and abuse of power—which is to say, with issues of democracy and justice. The ground of political theory lies at the crossroads of history and everyday life. Political theorists can only pretend to “follow the action” from Goodyear blimps of alienated intellectualism.

What theorists know of *praxis* and the problem of hegemonic power comes through historical inherence and the human experience of temporal destiny. In Merleau-Ponty's words, “Historical understanding thus does not introduce a system of categories arbitrarily chosen; it only presupposes the possibility that we have a past which is ours and that we can recapture in our freedom the work of so many other freedoms. It assumes that we can clarify the choices of others through our own and ours through theirs, that we adjust one by the other and finally arrive at the truth.”⁸² This is the proper route for political theorists today. If it leads into Weber's iron cage, at least the result will be produced by political catastrophe rather than a failure of intellectual nerve.

Notes

1. John S. Nelson, “Destroying Political Theory in Order to Save It,” in this volume.
2. PPhT, especially 240–259.
3. PPhT, 256.
4. PPhT, 258–259. Cf. John Sallis, ed., *Heidegger and the Path of Thinking*, Pittsburgh, Duquesne University Press, 1970; Fred R. Dallmayr, *Twilight of Subjectivity*, Amherst, University of Massachusetts Press, 1981, 48–71.
5. Marjorie Grene's translation of the 1938 essay “The Age of the World View” by Martin Heidegger was published in *Measure*, 2, Summer, 1951, 269–284. Especially see 278–282. Another translation is available in: Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology, and Other Essays*, William Lovitt, trans., New York, Harper and Row, 1977.
6. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Themes from the Lectures at the College de France, 1952–1960*, John O'Neill, trans., Evanston, IL, Northwestern University Press, 1970, 109–110.
7. Werner Marx, *Heidegger and the Tradition*, T. Kisiel and M. Greene, trans., Evanston, IL, Northwestern University Press, 1971, 7–8.
8. See: Nelson, “Destroying Political Theory. . . .” Also see my discussion of the “postmodern ontological revolution” in “Political Science and the Post-Modern Critique of Scientism and Domination,” *Review of Politics*, 37, 3, July, 1975, 286–316.

9. See: Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, Garret Barden and John Cumming, eds., New York, Seabury Press, 1975; Gadamer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, David Linge, trans., Berkeley, University of California Press, 1977.
10. Cf. DSCT.
11. Richard E. Palmer, "Phenomenology as a Foundation for Post-Modern Philosophy of Literary Interpretation," *Cultural Hermeneutics*, 1, 1973, 207-233, on 216.
12. Richard E. Palmer, *Hermeneutics*, Evanston, IL, Northwestern University Press, 1969, 180.
13. Ira L. Strauber, "Politics and Values in a World without Criteria," in this volume.
14. PT, 137.
15. PT, 150.
16. Arendt discussed "world alienation" in her magnum opus, *The Human Condition*, Garden City, NY, Doubleday, 1959, 228-231. This is not the place to consider the problem of nature in Heidegger's thought, especially as treated by Grene, Merleau-Ponty, and Erwin Straus.
17. Cf. PT, 159-161.
18. Henri Lefebvre, *Everyday Life in the Modern World*, Sacha Rabinovitch, trans., New York, Harper and Row, 1971.
19. Strauber, "Politics and Values in a World without Criteria," in this volume. For some connections between the American liberal tradition and current problems of language, technology, and bureaucracy, see my "Political Science . . .," 310-316. See also my examination of the conflict between the public sphere and the U.S. corporate state in "Beyond the Energy Complex: The Role of the Public Sphere," paper for the Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, New York, September 1-4, 1981, coauthored with Ernest J. Yanarella.
20. See: Thomas Luckmann, "Philosophy, Sciences, and Everyday Life," *Phenomenology and the Social Sciences*, Maurice Natanson, ed., Evanston, IL, Northwestern University Press, 1973, 143-185. As Paul Piccone argues, the "*Lebenswelt* does include the empirical and commonsense world, but also it encompasses much more." See his "Phenomenological Marxism," *Telos*, 9, Fall, 1971, 3-31, on 24-25. Also see: Herbert G. Reid and Ernest J. Yanarella, "Toward a Post-Modern Theory of American Political Science and Culture," *Cultural Hermeneutics*, 2, 1, 1974, 91-166.
21. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, Alphonso Lingis, trans., Evanston, IL, Northwestern University Press, 1968, 258-259. As I argue in "Totality, Temporality, and Praxis: Existential Phenomenology and Critical Political Theory," *Canadian Journal of Political and Social Theory*, 2, 1, Winter, 1978, 113-135, on 126-127: from this perspective, we can pursue a "phenomenology of American culture as a system of modes . . . [that] has as its *telos* the critique of any aspects

of the politico-economic tradition and current discourse that are *ideological* in the sense of concealing or contradicting those universal, essential structures of the life-world on which the real achievements and potential projects of the American people have been or may be founded."

22. *Ibid.*

23. Alfred Schutz, *The Phenomenology of the Social World*, George Walsh and Frederick Lehnert, trans., Evanston, IL, Northwestern University Press, (1932), 1967, 12.

24. Fred R. Dallmayr, "Heidegger on Intersubjectivity," *Human Studies*, 3, 1980, 221-246, on 228.

25. Schutz, *The Phenomenology of the Social World*, 241.

26. PT, 40. Cf. Alfred Schutz and Thomas Luckmann, *The Structures of the Life-World*, Evanston, IL, Northwestern University Press, 1973.

27. Arthur S. Parsons, "Interpretive Sociology: The Theoretical Significance of Verstehen in the Constitution of Social Reality," *Human Studies*, 1, 1978, 111-137.

28. DSCT, 73.

29. DSCT, 81.

30. DSCT, 85.

31. DSCT, 83.

32. PICA.

33. PICA, 231, 237.

34. PICA, 271. Also see ETK.

35. Cf. Richard Ashcraft, "On the Problem of Methodology and the Nature of Political Theory," *Political Theory*, 3, 1, February, 1975, 5-25; J.G.A. Pocock, "Political Theory, History, and Myth: A Salute to John Gunnell," *Annals of Scholarship*, 1, 4, Fall, 1980, 3-25; MMST; Pocock, "Intentions, Traditions and Methods: Sound on a Fog-Horn," 57-62.

36. MMST, 44.

37. MMST, 39.

38. PT, 125.

39. Cf. the exchange between Pocock and Gunnell cited in footnote 35.

40. Hans-Georg Gadamer, "The Problem of Historical Consciousness," *Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal*, 5, 1, Fall, 1975, 1-52, on 26-27.

41. Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Practical Philosophy as a Model of the Human Sciences," *Research in Phenomenology*, 9, 1979, 74-85 on 76.

42. *Ibid.*, 83-85.

43. *Ibid.*

44. See: Edmund Husserl, *Crisis of European Sciences*, David Carr, trans., Evanston, IL, Northwestern University Press, 1970; Enzo Paci, *The Function of the Sciences and the Meaning of Man*, Evanston, IL, Northwestern University Press, 1972.

45. PSTA, 96.

46. Herbert G. Reid, "Critical Phenomenology and the Dialectical Foundations of Social Change," *Dialectical Anthropology*, 2, 1977, 107-130. Also see my "Totality, Temporality, and Praxis," 119.

47. *Ibid.*, 116-117.

48. *Ibid.*, 118: "Modern capitalist and technocratic institutional designs and policy emphases on nature as nothing but the *other* of freedom have promoted the loss of our capacity for dialectical sensibility with nature as its *primordial mediation*."

49. Nelson, "Destroying Political Theory . . .," in this volume.

50. *Ibid.*

51. Gadamer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, 196-197. Cf. C.A. van Peursen, "Life-World and Structures," *Patterns of the Life-World*, James M. Edie, ed., Evanston, IL, Northwestern University Press, 1970, 139-153. This shows why the "importance of phenomenology for the scientific investigation of the life-world . . . is precisely the perspective of transcendence within the empirical data." This crucial aspect of phenomenology is ignored in Strauber's otherwise excellent essay for this volume.

52. Joseph Gabel, *False Consciousness*, New York, Harper and Row, 1975, 229, 271.

53. *Ibid.*, 151. I would retain Gabel's point while rejecting the extremity of this formulation. See my analysis of the concept of reification in my article on "Critical Phenomenology. . . ."

54. Michel Foucault, quoted in Richard Drinnon, *Facing West*, New York, Meridian, 1970, xv.

55. For Garry Wills's memorable description of Richard Nixon as "the living fulfillment of the Alger period's success manuals" and as the "Market's Servant," see: *Nixon Agonistes*, New York, New American Library, 1971, 166-177. David Frye's comedic portrayal of Nixon is available on phonograph records, but only his stage and television performances allow us full appreciation of his artistic insights.

56. Robert Goodman, *The Last Entrepreneurs*, Boston, South End Press, 1982. For the concept of the "commodity self," see: Stuart Ewen, "Advertising as Social Production: Selling the System," *Up the Mainstream*, Herbert G. Reid, ed., New York, McKay, 1974, 130-152.

57. For this theme in the context of political education, see: Herbert G. Reid and Randall H. Ihara, "Ideology Critique and Problems of Student Consciousness in the United States," *Cultural Hermeneutics*, 3, 3, March, 1976, 217-244.

58. See: Stuart Ewen, *Captains of Consciousness*, New York, McGraw-Hill, 1976.
59. Theodor W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, London, New Left Books, 1974, 146-147.
60. I discuss the ideas of Barron and Cobb in "Critical Phenomenology . . ." and "Totality, Temporality, and Praxis."
61. *Ibid.*
62. Calvin O. Schrag, *Radical Reflection and the Origin of the Human Sciences*, Lafayette, IN, Purdue University Press, 1980, 68-69.
63. Michel de Certeau, "History: Ethics, Science, and Fiction," *Social Science as Moral Inquiry*, Norma Haan, et al., New York, Columbia University Press, 1983, 125-152. Also notice the discussion of "The Coming Back of Time," for which I have been arguing for several years.
64. Merleau-Ponty, *The Primacy of Perception, and Other Essays*, James M. Edie, ed., Evanston, IL, Northwestern University Press, 1964, 195. Cf. my discussion of time as the field of human development in "The Politics of Time: Conflicting Philosophical Perspectives and Trends," *The Human Context*, 4, 3, Autumn, 1972, 456-483.
65. Herbert G. Reid, "American Social Science in the Politics of Time and the Crisis of Technocratic Society: Toward a Critical Phenomenology," *Politics and Society*, 3, 2, Winter, 1973, 201-243.
66. Alain Touraine, *The Self-Production of Society*, Derek Coltman, trans., Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1977, 27-28, 123.
67. *Ibid.*, 374.
68. *Ibid.*, 127.
69. Paci, *The Function of the Sciences and the Meaning of Man*.
70. Touraine, *The Self-Production of Society*, 145. On the analysis of social movements, see: *ibid.*, 321.
71. *Ibid.*, 50.
72. *Ibid.*, 5.
73. *Ibid.*, 114.
74. *Ibid.*, 117.
75. *Ibid.*, 120.
76. Alain Touraine, *The Voice and the Eye*, Alan Duff, trans., Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1981, 149.
77. For example, see the contributions on distorted communication by Claus Mueller and Jürgen Habermas in Hans Peter Dreitzel, ed., *Recent Sociology* No. 2, New York, Macmillan, 1970, 101-148.

78. Touraine, *The Self-Production of Society*, 47.
79. Jean Domarchi, "Matérialisme dialectique et conscience de classe," *Espirt*, May—June, 1948, 824.
80. Touraine, *The Self-Production of Society*, 47.
81. Reid, "Totality, Temporality, and Praxis."
82. Merleau-Ponty, *The Primacy of Perception*, 204.

CHAPTER X

Why Should Practicing Political Scientists Care About the Philosophy of Social Sciences?

J. DONALD MOON

Practicing political scientists seem to care very much about the philosophy of social science. They manifest their concern in any number of ways: by allocating a great deal of space to the discussion of these issues in professional journals, by addressing methodological questions in reports of substantive research, by focusing critiques of competing programs of research on these concerns, by setting up the core courses in graduate programs around issues of "scope and method," and by tenuring people who specialize in such topics. But from time to time, some dissatisfaction is expressed about the attention we pay to these so-called second-order questions. Ironically enough, the complaints often come from people who are among the principal participants in methodological debates.

In recent years, for example, John Gunnell has bemoaned the baleful influence of philosophy and, in general, metatheoretical concerns in political science. Citing the formidable authority of Max Weber, he decries the "methodological pestilence" that prevails in political science. While apparently conceding that methodological discussion might have some role in "legitimizing" particular modes of inquiry, Gunnell deplores the fact that the literature of the philosophy of science has come "to shape the goals of [the social sciences], their image of themselves, their ideas about the demands of scientific research and the nature and role of theory, and even their actual practice."¹

This development is pernicious, Gunnell argues, because it rests on a deep and serious mistake about the relationship between methodology and substantive research. methodology, Gunnell insists, must not be the basis for substantive inquiry. On the contrary, "epistemology and methodology

are only meaningful as explications, justifications, and critical analyses of the substantive norms and criteria employed in the practice of inquiry."² When methodology ceases to be a *post hoc* rationalization of what practicing political scientists have actually done, when it comes to be seen as a foundation or basis for inquiry, it contributes "to the poverty of substantive political theory by suspending discussions in the rarefied atmosphere of methodology."³ Invoking a rigid dichotomy between substantive political inquiry and "philosophy," Gunnell decries the role of philosophy in setting the agenda for political science:

The problems that have traditionally provided the basis for discussions of the scope and method of political science . . . have not been issues arising out of theoretical arguments or even, to any great extent, out of the conduct of everyday research. They have been imports from philosophy, and, consequently, discussions of these problems have remained in the realm of philosophical metatheory.⁴

From Gunnell's perspective, the entire field of political theory has become an "alienated" enterprise, "caught in a world of secondary and tertiary claims, in a set of problems, analyses, and solutions which involve little more than metatheoretical claims about metatheoretically constituted objects." Because political theorists are continually "trying to keep pace with the latest trends in metatheory and paraphilosophy, political theory has become a series of non-claims divorced from any practice except that created by its own inner dialectic."⁵

In spite of such declamations and the baleful influence methodology is supposed to have had, methodological discussions continue.⁶ Indeed, the very critique of methodology turns into one more occasion for methodological reflection of a kind that may be even further removed from political inquiry than the already rarefied level of methodological discourse. Now, it could be that social scientists are people who, in addition to their substantive concerns, just happen to find methodological reflection interesting. Because most of us work under quasi-artisan conditions in universities, we are free to pursue our interests, and so we engage in a certain amount of discussion of second-order topics. But in the true spirit of second-order discourse, I leave this empirical hypothesis to one side, in order to ask whether there are any reasons, rooted in the imperatives of political inquiry itself, for students of politics to pursue methodological questions.

One obvious reason, suggested by the very terms of Gunnell's critique, is that a scholar may wish to raise methodological questions in order to pursue substantive inquiry in a self-reflective manner. This is suggested by Gunnell when he allows that philosophy of social science may be permitted

a role in justifying a particular mode of inquiry. This is, in light of his overall argument, a rather curious admission, for how could something function as a justification for a particular procedure unless it could also be a reason for adopting the procedure. If *R* can justify *P* when offered after the performance of *P*, then surely *R* can also provide a reason for doing *P* if offered before *P* has been done. If the philosophy of social science can legitimate modes of inquiry, then it can "shape the goals of [the social sciences], their image of themselves, their ideas about the demands of scientific research and the nature and role of theory, and even their actual practice."

There is every reason to believe that an interest in theoretical self-consciousness does direct at least some practicing political scientists to reflect upon the mode of inquiry they employ. Given the plethora of approaches, the range of conflicting theories, and the fact that disciplinary boundaries are poorly defined, it would be odd indeed if political scientists did not consciously articulate the goals and principles of their research. In fields where paradigms or disciplinary matrices are well-established, "normal science" can be expected. Students learn how to recognize and formulate significant problems (or "puzzles") for research, the methods of their field of inquiry, and the appropriate research techniques, while mastering the substantive theories and basic information that the field offers. Scientific practice continues with relatively little conscious attention to methodological issues because they are not be problematic or controversial. Under these circumstances, most criticism of ongoing research is internal criticism, couched in terms of the standards and exemplars accepted by the researchers involved.

In the social sciences, with the possible exception of economics, these conditions do not hold to any significant degree. Research is often criticized on external grounds. The entire program of research—its goals, methods, and basic theoretical conceptualizations—is faulted as misconceived. Researchers are therefore called upon to define what they are doing, to distinguish their programs from the programs of others, in order to respond to such external criticism. They have to become self-conscious about what they are doing in ways that practitioners of normal science need not be.

Many examples from political science support this interpretation of our predicament—examples, I might add, that are drawn from the ongoing practice of research and that cannot be construed as political scientists merely responding to controversies originating in other fields. Perhaps the most notable is the controversy over community power research that surfaced in the 1950s but that continues today. Here researchers with different substantive accounts of politics have been embroiled in a controversy over methodological and conceptual issues. The necessity of raising

these issues has arisen from the nature of the substantive disagreements themselves, as the critical disputes have turned on whether the methods employed by different schools are appropriate to the theoretical issues at stake. The pluralist critique of power-elite theories quickly came to pivot on questions such as the falsifiability of these theories.⁷ Similarly, critics of pluralism soon responded that pluralists fail to understand the nature of dispositional concepts such as power and the problems that they pose for developing adequate theories.⁸ As is well known, this debate has implications for the whole range of metatheoretical questions that we face in political science, including the nature of social science theory, problems of theory testing and explanation, the relevance of actors' self-understandings to political inquiry, and the admissibility in social science accounts of concepts such as ideology or false consciousness. Philosophers have joined this debate and have made valuable contributions to it.⁹ But its terms and original impetus have been provided by the research agendas of the political and social scientists involved.

If the debate over community power is one of the most familiar, it is by no means a unique example of conflicts among substantive theories forcing us to attend to metatheoretical issues. The critique of functionalism in social science, for example, involves the adequacy of functionalist accounts of social phenomena, with critics holding that they do not explain the institutions or structures being investigated. At the same time, functionalism has been criticized for projecting an ideological image of society in which structural conflict is impossible, a charge that led to considerable discussion of the role of values and evaluation in social and political inquiry.¹⁰ Similarly, advocates of rational-choice theories of social phenomena have defended their work by drawing on discussions of methodological individualism.¹¹ The "revisionist" debate in democratic theory has brought many metatheoretical issues to the fore, particularly the problem of values and ideology in empirical inquiry. Discussions of the class character and autonomy of the capitalist state (or the state in capitalist societies) turn in essential ways upon methodological questions, especially the problem of specifying such concepts as "non-decisions" in ways that allow for empirical testing of theories.¹²

All of these cases essentially involve methodological issues, and the introduction of "metatheoretical" concerns has resulted from the substantive research agendas of social scientists. While these scholars have drawn liberally upon the writing of philosophers, the problems which they have addressed are by no means "imports" from philosophy. Moreover, the discussion of these problems has had great "relevance for scientific practice."¹³

Not all metatheoretical discussions in political science have been as closely related to substantive issues as those just mentioned, and when completely divorced from substantive concerns, they are an unfortunate diversion from political inquiry. Metatheoretical inquiry is most valuable when it is tied closely to explicating the logic of ongoing political inquiry. It is probably least valuable and sometimes even harmful when it takes the form of abstract prescriptions, based on some particular account of the philosophy of science, telling practitioners how to do political research. When methodological discussion is closely tied to the concerns of actual research and theory, it can perform a critical role, unearthing assumptions and conceptions which make the activity problematic. It can be critical and can help to shape the practice of inquiry precisely because it is rooted in and dialectically related to political inquiry itself. Such metatheoretical discourse does not claim an authority based on some received model of "science," but on its usefulness in explicating the logic and practice of political research.

As long as political science is home to a number of competing research programs, continual attention to methodological issues will be necessary. As indicated by the controversies just discussed, substantive and methodological concerns are inextricably interwoven in research and theorizing. As long as substantive theories are in dispute, methodological issues will also be raised. In some ways, the criticisms of methodology which Gunnell and others have voiced might be seen as a variation on an old complaint that political science lacks a single disciplinary matrix or paradigm within which "normal science" would be possible, for it is in just this situation where methodological discussion would tend to disappear.

Now, it might be granted that metatheoretical issues will inevitably arise when substantive disagreements exist; but it might be claimed that this is simply unfortunate. Such discussions, the argument might run, will not contribute to settling the substantive disputes but will merely divert effort from substantive research, slowing the progress of the discipline. "Political science's obsession with the theory of theory has led to a search for a chimera and had deflected attention away from substantive or practical theory," according to Gunnell.¹⁴ We spend our time discussing theories about science, and so we have less time to spend developing scientific theories. Worse, some of us have actually come to hold "the belief that metatheoretical accounts . . . of social scientific explanation are equivalent to theories of social phenomena and/or constitute approaches to inquiry."¹⁵

The irony of Gunnell's criticisms of methodology, of course, is that they are themselves a contribution to the metatheoretical discussion he deplores and stimulate further metatheoretical responses such as this one. Gunnell's own practice however, is testimony to one of the important

reasons that political scientists must attend to the philosophy of social science: because such attention may be instrumental to the progress of substantive inquiry. Whether metatheoretical discourse is instrumental or impedimental to substantive inquiry is, as Gunnell argues, a "contingent" matter.¹⁶ To determine this ultimately requires what might be called a theory of knowledge formation. If one knew the factors that contribute to the growth of knowledge, one would be able to determine the extent to which (or the conditions under which) attention to methodological issues was a diversion from or a contribution to scientific progress. We obviously have no such theory, and we may doubt (on metatheoretical grounds!) the possibility of our achieving one. Thus, we are forced to consider more or less plausible accounts of the relationship between method and inquiry in the context of contemporary political science. Although spending all of our time and energy on methodology would preclude substantive research, it does not follow that any methodological inquiry is a diversion from substantive work.

In Gunnell's case, we may presume that he has devoted so much energy and time to methodology, not because he wishes to contribute to the pestilence that he deplors, but because we need metatheoretical work in order to help us get things right: to save us from errors so that we can proceed more effectively with the business of political inquiry. For example, he inveighs against the tendency that he discerns for political scientists to take philosophical conceptions of science as prescriptive guides to research. Likewise, he attacks the widespread acceptance of an instrumentalist conception of theory in political science. These errors, he charges, are in part responsible for the sorry state of political theory today. If we could overcome them, the way would be open to new directions in theorizing and a more vigorous program of political inquiry. Unfortunately, Gunnell's criticisms of the practices of political scientists are less successful than they might be precisely because they are not closely rooted in and related to current programs of research and inquiry. This can be seen by examining his critique of the instrumentalist view of theories.

The "instrumentalist view of theories holds that a theory is "a rule or a principle for analyzing and symbolically representing certain materials of gross experience, and at the same time an instrument in a technique for inferring observation statements from other statements."¹⁷ Crucial to this view are the reduction of theory to the functions of prediction and explanation and the denial that theories can properly be said to be true or false. To instrumentalists, the issue of the truth of a theory does not arise, because their only interest is in the power of a theory to generate correct predictions, given a set of "initial conditions."

Gunnell shows convincingly that many political scientists hold instrumentalist conceptions of theory—or at least, that their discussions of theory

contain important instrumentalist views.¹⁸ He also draws on philosophies of science, notably the work of Wilfrid Sellars, to show that instrumentalism cannot account for theories in the natural sciences. But Gunnell is less successful in showing that this error has, in fact, inhibited political inquiry. At one point, he suggests that "instrumentalism provides a rationale for the plethora of conceptual frameworks that is so characteristic of the social sciences, as well as the rather indiscriminate exchange of models between various fields."¹⁹ However, this proliferation of prototheories may have taken place had political scientists held realist conceptions of theory. Indeed, many theories in competing paradigms of political inquiry are seen by their adherents as providing accounts of the essential nature of political things. At least, that is true of many systems theories,²⁰ rational-choice theories,²¹ and Marxist theories,²² to name but three paradigms. Moreover, Gunnell does not even attempt to show that the plethora of prototheories in the field or the eclectic borrowings of models from different fields have impeded scientific progress. It is at least arguable that the multiplication of competing research programs enhances the development of knowledge. It may have been necessary to explore a large variety of approaches in the 1950s and 1960s as political science attempted to deal with such substantive problems as the emergence of new nations, the incorporation of non-Western political experience into our field of study, the development of new techniques of research and analysis, and the growth of new sources and kinds of data. That so many of these approaches were false starts is, of course, just the point: it is only in retrospect (if then) that we can say whether a path of inquiry is successful.

Gunnell's critique of the instrumentalist conception of theory in political science is not completely satisfactory because it rests essentially at the metatheoretical level. If we are to show that instrumentalism is a mistake in political science, we must not be content to recount philosophical objections to this account of theory. Instead, we must delve into the ongoing research based in part on instrumentalism, in order to show where this notion has led investigators to make substantive errors. We cannot confine ourselves to metatheoretical discourse, because substantive inquiry can and, in some cases, has progressed in spite of investigators' holding palpably incorrect views at the metatheoretical level.

Although Gunnell's critique of instrumentalism is incomplete, the issues that he raises are important. In many cases, his criticisms could probably be sustained by a careful reconstruction of programs of substantive political inquiry. But such a reconstruction might well show some surprising results: for instance, that in spite of being in error, instrumentalism might have played a positive role in preventing investigators from making more serious mistakes in the development of a research program.

Striking cases of instrumentalism in political science (and in the social sciences generally) may be found in the works of some adherents to the rational-choice model of human behavior. For example, Milton Friedman advocates an unabashedly instrumentalist conception of theory, arguing that the truth of a theory's basic assumptions or principles is irrelevant to the decision to accept it: "the relevant question to ask about the 'assumptions' of a theory is not whether they are descriptively 'realistic,' for they never are, but whether they are sufficiently good approximations for the purpose in hand. And this question can be answered only by seeing whether the theory works, which means whether it yields sufficiently accurate predictions."²³ Friedman's position has been widely accepted by adherents of this approach in political science. For instance, William Riker and Peter Ordeshook cite Friedman in making the claim that:

We postulate goals for people and infer a mathematical calculus from their actions not because people *in fact* have such goals or perform such calculations, but because they act *as if* they had postulated goals and used a calculus. For example, so-called satisficing behavior can be understood by the rather involved calculus described previously—not because people necessarily perform such calculations consciously, but because this calculus satisfactorily accounts for observed behavior.²⁴

At the metatheoretical level, there are compelling objections to this position.²⁵ It does not follow, however, that its widespread acceptance has had deleterious consequences for scientific progress. In fact, the acceptance of this position may have been valuable in enabling practitioners to continue to develop this research program. At the time that it made its way into political inquiry, political scientists generally believed that theories which were inconsistent with known "facts" should be rejected. This is what Lakatos termed "naïve falsificationism."²⁶ Given the "obvious" lack of realism in the basic premises of the theory, investigators may have felt pressure to reject the paradigm entirely, had the instrumentalist conception of theory not been available to provide a rationale for continuing work on it. In this case, one mistaken view (a radically instrumentalist conception of theory) may have helped to rescue investigators from the consequences of another (naïve falsificationism).

We cannot always hope for such fortuitous combinations of errors; and so students of political inquiry have a very real interest in understanding the logic of their procedures—in getting things right in the first place! Moreover, to the extent that the acceptance of instrumentalism has discouraged work on competing research programs based on different assumptions about human rationality, it may have impeded scientific progress. While documenting such influence may be difficult, one may at least argue

that it has discouraged the development of more restricted concepts of rationality and their application to political phenomena. Thus, the instrumentalist conception of theory might have set back political inquiry in some important respects, even while facilitating it in others, but determining this would require close attention to the actual development of theory and research within those traditions where instrumentalism has been important.

To his credit, Gunnell has not been content simply to criticize prevailing instrumentalist conceptions of theory, but has also gone on to develop at least the outlines of an alternate conception of theory and to offer a substantive theory which accords with his alternate conception. The job of theory, according to Gunnell, is not to "describe, explain, or evaluate something" but to say "what kind of thing it is." Theories "indicate what is to be explained and provide the criteria of explanation."²⁷ The (or at least a) theory required for political inquiry, Gunnell argues, is the theory of action; and he presents a sketch of such a theory drawing heavily on recent work in the philosophy of action and the philosophy of language. He offers a number of interesting suggestions and ideas that make a valuable contribution to these areas of philosophy, but what is puzzling about this part of his work is how it is relevant to political inquiry. How does it address any of the problems that political scientists have studied? Or how would accepting this theory of action lead us to conduct political inquiry differently? What are the criteria of explanation that this theory supports or provides? And how would they affect the way we explain such things as the stability of the international order, the existence and pattern of cleavage structures in a society, or the causes of democratic stability? When Gunnell first offered this theory, he claimed that "some questions that social scientists continually grapple with are simply not solvable outside the context of a substantive theory of action."²⁸ Until we learn what these questions are and how his theory of action solves them, it—like his critique of instrumentalism—will remain in the rarefied atmosphere of philosophy.

A more compelling example of the contribution of the philosophy of social science to substantive inquiry is the recent critique of the nomological model of explanation. In the period following World War II, this model was widely adopted by political scientists, in part due to the "behavioral movement" and the general aspiration to make the discipline more "scientific." For a long time, it represented one of the principal methodological commitments of the dominant schools of political science. But beginning in the late 1960s, the adequacy of this account of political explanation increasingly came into question. The most successful critiques were those drawing closely on notable examples of political research and showing that the nomological model of explanation does not provide an adequate reconstruction of successful explanations of political phenomena. In the

remainder of this essay, I outline the nomological model and its critique in order to show how metatheoretical discourse can make a positive contribution to substantive political inquiry.

The nomological model is a formalization of the role of generalizations in explanation.²⁹ According to this model, an event is explained by subsuming it under a generalization or lawlike statement. Thus, one can explain why *A* occurred in a certain situation *S* only if one can offer a generalization of the form: in situations of type *S*, events of type *A* will occur. Without the general statement, we would have only the coincidental occurrence of *S* and *A*, and not a genuine explanation.

Because political scientists are interested in explaining political phenomena, accepting this view requires a systematic concern for the discovery of lawlike statements and the development of theories to "support" them. To determine the actual impact of this account of explanation requires a careful and extensive study of the research done during the postwar period. But there is little doubt that it had an important effect, at least on political scientists' descriptions of their work and on judgments made of particular types of research. In comparative politics, for example, the predilection for "generality" or "nomothetic" results often led political scientists to denigrate "area studies," because work on a specific culture or society is too particularistic and not sufficiently "comparative" or "general."³⁰ Thus, it has fostered a neglect of the specific and often unique context of meanings of different cultures. "Concern with stimulus equivalence and particular instruments takes primacy. The main focus of attention becomes one in which the realities of cultural diversity are not interesting and revealing, but obstacles to be wished away, so that certain canons can be observed, certain instruments used."³¹

At the same time that more and more political scientists adopted the covering-law model of explanation, they continued to accept what might be called the commonsense understanding of political phenomena. They routinely identified and described political actions using concepts such as purpose, desire, belief, and intention. And even when their interests went beyond the doings of specific individuals, they used an intentionalist vocabulary that was tied to particular historical and cultural settings. This combination of commitments characterized behavioralism, distinguishing it from the more radical behaviorism, which rejected the use of intentionalist concepts altogether.

The difficulty with this position is that these two commitments stand in some tension with each other. It has proven inordinately difficult to reconstruct the explanations which political scientists give of political actions and some other political phenomena according to the covering-law model—or at least, to do so in a non-trivial way. Alvin Goldman has shown that

it is possible to recast explanations of action in covering-law form, but the kind of generalization needed for the model to work makes the whole enterprise essentially trivial. In Goldman's formulation, for example, the required generalization has the following form:

If any agent *S* wants to do *A'* (at *t*) more than any other act, and if *S* believes that basic act *A1* is more likely to generate *A'* than any other (incompatible) basic act, and if *S* is in standard conditions with respect to *A1* (at *t*), then *S* does *A1* (at *t*).³²

The trouble with this generalization is that it is too general. It is little more than a trivial restatement of what it means to describe something as an intentional action, as opposed to reflexive or other forms of behavior. A research program committed to explaining actions by covering laws would have no way to develop, for all the real work of explaining specific actions is done by the accounts of the agent's purposes and beliefs, not by the general law. Contrary to the view that the general laws are the crucial part of the explanatory enterprise, particularistic aspects are decisive.³³

In my chapter in the *Handbook of Political Science*,³⁴ I criticize the nomological model by examining some of the explanatory accounts contained in such classics of modern political science as Robert Dahl's *Who Governs?*,³⁵ Edward Banfield's *The Moral Basis of a Backward Society*,³⁶ and Samuel Beer's *British Politics in the Collectivist Age*.³⁷ Through careful attention to actual examples, I demonstrate that the covering-law model does not provide a satisfactory explication of the logic of these accounts and that a different model is required.

The best alternative focuses on the "meaning" of the phenomena under investigation. In the case of individual actions, the most plausible model is that of the practical inference or practical syllogism, which provides an account of the meaning of the action in terms of the actor's intentions. But such explanations are not sufficient. As Gunnell and others have pointed out, intentional action is a kind of "conventional object." Understanding the actor's intentions involves locating both action and intentions in the conventions and practices of the society, and this requires that we move to a different level of interpretation: to articulate what Beer calls (following A.D. Lindsay) the "operative ideals" of a political culture. Thus, I show how interpretations of individual actions in terms of the practical syllogism are essential to understanding the logic of these explanatory accounts of political phenomena, and I do the same for interpretations of practices and conventions in terms of the operative ideals of a political culture. While drawing extensively on recent writings in the philosophy of social science, my object in the essay is the analysis of actual examples

of political research. By not divorcing metatheoretical discussions from substantive inquiry, I minimize the dangers of losing touch with the practices which it is intended to explicate and inform.

One of the specific dangers in this area, which many recent critiques of the covering-law model have not avoided, is the substitution of one strictly philosophical account of the structure of explanation with another. All too often, critics of the nomological model make claims for "interpretive" or "hermeneutic" models that resemble earlier claims for the covering-law model. They advocate an exclusive ideal of interpretive and particularistic social science to replace the ideal of a generalizing, nomothetic social science. This is undoubtedly one reason why practicing social scientists have paid little attention to the philosophical criticisms of social science offered by people like Peter Winch and A.R. Louch.³⁸

These critics neglect the centrality to social science of phenomena other than human action. While the focus on action is essential, much of what we study is not what people *do* but what *happens to them*. Most obvious in this regard are the unintended consequences of action, which result from the interactions of people with each other and natural systems. Sometimes these interactions can be analyzed step by step to explain the aggregate outcome as a straightforward composition of the individual actions that bring it about. But other times, especially where many people are involved and the interactions are complex, no such decomposition is possible. Then we must develop a model of the social structure, what Norbert Elias has called a "figuration,"³⁹ in order to conceptualize and explain the phenomena in question. Virtually all of the studies that I analyze use interpretive explanations, but they also employ generalizations or lawlike statements that go well beyond the rules and conventions figuring so prominently in hermeneutic accounts. Thus, I find that political science employs several modes of explanation. Close attention to continuing inquiry demonstrates that neither the interpretive nor the nomological account of explanation captures the logic of explanation in the social science.

We must be grateful to Gunnell and other critics who call our attention to the many ways in which a preoccupation with metatheory may be pernicious. Nonetheless, we should accept Gunnell's critique only if qualified in significant ways. Not even a casual examination of substantive disputes in political science supports the view that substantive and methodological concerns can be neatly separated. All significant disputes involve methodological issues, so that progress in substantive inquiry not only can be but has been facilitated by attention to metatheoretical issues. Still, metatheory is likely to be most valuable when it is tied closely to the explication and analysis of substantive research; that is, when it stands in a dialectical relationship to inquiry. Practicing political scientists must (and do) care

about the philosophy of social science, but only when it speaks directly to concrete issues encountered in research. If metatheory is not to degenerate into a set of "metatheoretical claims about metatheoretically constituted objects,"⁴⁰ it must arise from and return to ongoing practices of political inquiry.

Notes

1. ETK, 447.

2. ETK, 456.

3. ETK, 450.

4. PSTA, 92.

5. ISPO, 26.

6. In what follows, I adopt Gunnell's opposition between "substantive" and "metatheoretical." To avoid repetition, I use more or less interchangeably a variety of terms for "second-order" discourse, including metatheory, methodology, philosophy of social science, and (sometimes) philosophy. Important and interesting distinctions could be made among these concepts, but I do not pursue them here. Note also that I deal only with the relationship between methodology broadly conceived and what is generally called "empirical political science." I do not, then, deal with Gunnell's general critique of political theory, except insofar as it bears on these particular issues.

7. This is essentially the charge that Dahl makes in his famous "Critique of the Ruling Elite Model" (*American Political Science Review*, 52, 2, June, 1958, 463-469). He claims that "the evidence for a ruling elite . . . has not been satisfactorily examined . . . [because] the examination has not employed satisfactory criteria to determine what constitutes a fair test of the basic hypothesis." (469) The way in which "elitist" theories structure research and findings is a major subject of: Nelson Polsby, *Community Power and Political Theory*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1963, especially on 95-97. These pages contain a discussion of some of the methodological issues raised in testing such theories.

8. See: Peter Bachrach and Morton Baratz, "Two Faces of Power," *American Political Science Review*, 56, 4, December, 1962, 947-952. Especially significant in this respect is the discussion of nondecisions and the mobilization of bias. Bachrach and Baratz contend that the methods and conceptualization of the problem of power in pluralist theory determines the results of the pluralists' empirical work.

9. See: Steven Lukes, *Power*, London, Macmillan, 1973.

10. See: William Flanigan and Edwin Fogelman, "Functional Analysis," *Contemporary Political Analysis*, James C. Charlesworth, ed., New York, Free Press, 1967, 72-85; N. J. Demerath and Richard Peterson, ed., *System, Change, and Conflict*,

New York, Free Press, 1967, especially the essays by Davis and Haas (on functionalist explanation) and by Dahrendorf and Hacker (on functionalism and ideology). The argument about functionalist explanations has recently arisen in a different context: assessing Marxist theories of history. Cf. G.A. Cohen, *Karl Marx's Theory of History*, Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press, 1978; John Elster, "Cohen on Marx's Theory of History," *Political Studies*, 28, 1, March, 1980, 121-128; G.A. Cohen, "Functional Explanation: Reply to Elster," *Political Studies*, 28, 1, March, 1980, 129-135. To be sure, philosophers have joined these discussions of functionalist explanation: Carl G. Hempel, "The Logic of Functional Analysis," *Aspects of Scientific Explanation*, New York, Free Press, 1965, 297-330; Maurice Mandelbaum, "G.A. Cohen's Defense of Functional Explanation," *Philosophy of the Social Sciences*, 12, 3, September, 1982, 285-287. But this is a case in which they are responding to issues raised within political and social inquiry, not the other way around!

11. See: James Buchanan, "An Individualistic Theory of Political Process," *Varieties of Political Theory*, David Easton, ed., Englewood Cliffs, NJ, Prentice-Hall, 1966, 25-37, especially on 25-29.
12. See: Claus Offe, "Structural Problems of the Capitalist State," *German Political Studies*, K. Von Beyme, ed., Beverly Hills, Sage, 1974, Volume 1, 31-57, especially on 40ff.
13. Cf. PSTA, 92.
14. ETK, 459.
15. PTTA, 343.
16. ETK, 459.
17. Ernest Nagel, *The Structure of Science*, New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1961, 129.
18. See: PSPI, especially chapter 6.
19. PSPI, 201.
20. For example, Morton Kaplan writes of international systems in ways that make sense only on realist assumptions. Cf. "Systems Theory." *Contemporary Political Analysis*, 150-163, especially on 152-153.
21. Cf. Buchanan, "An Individualistic Theory of Political Process."
22. Cf. Cohen, *Karl Marx's Theory of History*.
23. Milton Friedman, "The Methodology of Positive Economics," *Essays in Positive Economics*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1953, 3-43, on 15.
24. William H. Riker and Peter Ordeshook, *An Introduction to Positive Political Theory*, Englewood Cliffs, NJ, Prentice-Hall, 1973, 30.
25. One of the best criticisms of Friedman is Ernest Nagel's essay, "Assumptions in Economic Theory" (*The Philosophy of Social Explanation*, Alan Ryan, ed., Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1973, 130-138). In his major work, *The Structure of Science*,

Nagel offers an excellent account and critique of instrumentalism generally. While Gunnell is correct in associating instrumentalism with what he calls LP/E, logical positivism or empiricism, many of the most striking and powerful criticisms of this approach can be found in the writing of positivists themselves. This is, I think, a testament to the intellectual virtues which were important motivations for the original positivist program.

26. Imre Lakatos, "Falsification and the Methodology of Scientific Research Programmes," *Criticism and the Growth of Knowledge*, Imre Lakatos and Alan Musgrave, eds., Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1970, 91-195.

27. ISPO, 34. At the risk of diversion into sterile, metatheoretical discussion, I would like to enter a caveat about Gunnell's use of the term "theory." It is often too broad: for example, "Theories are simply claims about reality and conceptions of reality." (PSTA, 84.) While the "and" is ambiguous, one way of taking this sentence would make the statement that "Gunnell's essay was published in a journal with a red cover" into a "theory." On the other hand, Gunnell's usage is too narrow when he claims that "Theories do not explain anything. That is, they are not instruments for understanding given objects." (ISPO, 34.) To see theories as explanatory is not to subscribe to the instrumentalist view of theories. Moreover, theories can be said to explain the facts, even while recognizing that the "facts" are not given, that the most elementary statements we make about anything presuppose some theory or theoretical claims. For if theories tell us "what kind of a thing [something] is," then they also give us grounds for expecting such a thing to behave in certain ways, to have certain properties. In politics, these expectations are often, perhaps generally, disappointed. When they are not, when our observations couched in the language of a theory accord with predictions, we can say (without losing our realist credentials) that the theory explained the facts at issue. Given what we might call Gunnell's "radical realism," it is hard to see how a theory could be tested or on what grounds a theory might be accepted or rejected.

28. PSTA, 91-92.

29. Here I ignore the many complexities of this model which are not relevant to the issues at hand. For a full account of the covering-law model, see: Hempel, *Aspects of Scientific Explanation*.

30. Cf. Fred Riggs, *Administration in Developing Countries*, Boston, Houghton Mifflin, 1964.

31. Dell Hymes, "Linguistic Aspects of Comparative Political Research," *The Methodology of Comparative Research*, Robert T. Holt and John Turner, eds., New York, Free Press, 1970, 295-341, on 322-323.

32. Alvin Goldman, *A Theory of Human Action*, Englewood Cliffs, NJ, Prentice-Hall, 1970, 73.

33. Cf. J. Donald Moon, "Interpretation, Theory, and Human Emancipation," *Strategies of Political Inquiry*, Elinor Ostrom, ed., Beverly Hills, Sage, 1982, 149-178.

34. J. Donald Moon, "The Logic of Political Inquiry," *Handbook of Political Science*, Fred I. Greenstein and Nelson W. Polsby, eds., Reading, MA, Addison-Wesley, 1975, Volume 1, 131-228.
35. Robert A. Dahl, *Who Governs?*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1961.
36. Edward Banfield, *The Moral Basis of a Backward Society*, New York, Free Press, 1958.
37. Samuel Beer, *British Politics in the Collectivist Age*, New York, Random House, 1969.
38. Cf. Brian Fay and J. Donald Moon, "What Would an Adequate Philosophy of Social Science Look Like?," *Philosophy of the Social Sciences*, 7, 3, September, 1977, 209-227.
39. Norbert Elias, *What Is Sociology?*, London, Hutchinson, 1979.
40. ISPO, 26.

CHAPTER XI

Politics and Values in a World Without Criteria

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I

In everyday thought and action, we acknowledge a gap between expectations and events. Disappointed expectations are not necessarily a matter for great concern or alarm. They might be attributed to the degree to which the world controls us and not the other way around, to the inevitable breach between ideals and realities, or to any number of other factors explaining our observation that things do not work out as expected. "Irony," in the sense of events which contradict expectations, is one of the realities of everyday life.

If irony of events is an unavoidable element of existence, then there should be no surprise that it appears as a theme in political theory. Obvious examples abound: Socrates in a democratic *polis*, a prudently Machiavellian prince confronting *fortuna*, a Hobbesian man acting according to Right, and Niebuhr's historical man facing the incongruities of life. Indeed, it could be argued (but not here) that one of the goals of political theory is to settle the unsettled expectations that arise out of ironic conditions. Alternately, as for Marx and Nietzsche, one of the goals might be to unsettle settled expectations, so as to attempt to give notice to ironic conditions. In either of these cases, an ironic voice is used to express a substantive vision of action in politics or the social world.

Much rarer, however, is an altogether purely ironic voice, expressing an utterly ironic vision of politics. The gap between expectations and events is then dealt with on its own terms, unmediated by a political ideology for action. Settled expectations may be unsettled, or vice versa, but not resolved or rounded by any vision other than the ironic. Then irony is primarily

all there is: it is *the* ideology. Such a thorough-going ironism would be like Wittgenstein's attitude toward a "form of life": it is to be accepted as given, implying that explanation can go no further than description. The theorist, as ironist, is "aware of the intractability of . . . life, [is] not willing to change it and [is] beyond consolation. . . . [Ironists] keep their balance by resolving to call life what it is, describing it (even with affection) as unyielding, as deadly."¹ The voice is that of a "resigned aristocrat suspending judgment and refusing to discriminate."²

But is this purely ironic voice political? Despite Marx's aphorism to the contrary, has it not been true that political theory in some way or another always tries to change the world? Perhaps it should be held that "only during truly desperate times is anyone entitled to accept the ironic posture and exercise what freedom for action remains by calmly describing . . . [what is taken] to be necessity."³ To limit the legitimacy of an ironic vision in this way would preserve the expectation that the political theorist's imagination ought not be passive except under extraordinary circumstances. But perhaps the inertia of a purely ironic vision is too great to be so limited. Are not the very idea and recognition of "desperate times" themselves revealed through the ironic vision, making ironic resignation self-executing? A purely ironic vision appears to be its own limit (or "form of life"), with no outside standard to adjudicate its appropriateness.

Hence, the implications for politics of a purely ironic vision tend not only toward "dissolv[ing] all belief in the possibility of positive political actions,"⁴ but toward skepticism and relativism as well: the former because ironism casts all perceptions of facts and values into doubt, and the latter because it rejects the possibility of knowing anything independently of the ironic position. In either mode, the inclination of a "resigned aristocrat" is to lean logically toward nihilism. Denying the existence of settled grounds, dissolving the responsibility to go beyond his own doubt, he accepts a world broken asunder and unable to be brought together: politics and values in a world without criteria.

II

In an early essay on the philosophy of political science, John Gunnell stipulated that "it is impossible to justify any theory, model, or methodology except in terms of a commitment to prior decisions about the nature of the universe which [it is] designed to explore."⁵ In following the evolution of his ideas on the nature of political inquiry, that dictum has led me to try to locate the tacit or implicit political universe behind his metatheoretical arguments. The preceding remarks regarding irony are meant to set the

stage for some observations and questions about that universe. Isolating the ironic dimensions of Gunnell's conception of political studies is a device for advancing what I find to be a vision of politics both unsettled and unsettling. It is an ironic vision in a complicated and not altogether pure way, but nonetheless tending toward politics and values in a world without criteria.

Gunnell seeks to unsettle our settled expectations that claims in contemporary academic political theory (both scientific and philosophical) have much relevance to the subjects purported to be their concern.⁶ He finds political studies "detached" or "alienated" from political practices, for reasons having to do with the social world and ourselves.⁷ Together, in a way which complicates the role of irony in his thought, these two factors are used by him to characterize the imagination of the contemporary political theorist as incongruously apolitical and atheoretical.

"Irony [often] represents the passage of heroes and the capacity to believe in heroism."⁸ At the very least, Gunnell's view of contemporary political theory is ironic in this sense.⁹ Indeed, it may contain an element of dashed romanticism. Gunnell views the past greats in political theory (Plato, Aristotle, and the usual line-up of all-stars) as heroes who destroyed political illusions,¹⁰ acted under the aesthetic compulsion "to give birth to the vision of symmetry and beauty which grows within,"¹¹ and strove "to transform social behavior and institutions in the image of . . . [a] new wisdom of order."¹² But the forces of twentieth-century society and epistemology are too great for any heroes in the future. For Gunnell, the heroic enterprise is over. Surprisingly, in the oscillation between sociology and epistemology, there arises a conception of our political universe which gives rise to relativism and nihilism on one hand and business as usual for political studies on the other. It is this side of Gunnell's ironic vision that I find remarkable.

Gunnell's most baneful view of the condition of political studies appears in his conclusion to *Political Theory: Tradition and Interpretation*.¹³ There, in his treatment of the enterprises of the history and philosophy of political thought, the social grounds for the death of the political theorist as hero are presented. The nemesis for a potentially heroic imagination in political theory and the basis for the ironic connection between it and world are one: the "open society" as a "condition of production."¹⁴

The latter concerns the audience for political theory, as well as the material required to make theory political. Regarding the audience, theory would be produced in a society "marked by conditions of extreme tolerance and the soft despotism of mass society that oppresses by ignoring" the aesthetic and transformational expectations of the political theorist's imag-

ination.¹⁵ The irony of this kind of theory is that it falls on the deaf ears of the moral and intellectual everyman of Tocqueville's egalitarian society.¹⁶

But such a sad fate presumes that *political* theory can be produced; and in fact, Gunnell doubts this. Because the open society is characterized by the "contraction, depreciation, and loss of identity of the political and public realm . . . [and] the precedence of private over public ends," the subject matter of politics has been all but lost.¹⁷ As a result, the putative theorist is an "anachronism,"¹⁸ existing "without a field of action, or anyone to notice him if he does act."¹⁹ The open society "represses . . . all contest . . . [and] all controversy,"²⁰ and political theory can no longer be "a kind of political action itself."²¹ The gap between theory and practice, the "disengagement of creative thought from the political order,"²² is so great as to lead Gunnell to declare that "the status of political theory today . . . does not deserve a great deal of attention,"²³ for any hope of transforming social life must come from "someplace else."²⁴

Gunnell's insistence on the lack of connections between exercises of the political-theoretical imagination and practices of the open society corresponds to an ironic view of events. Times are truly desperate for political theory: enough to make Gunnell a "resigned aristocrat" in its face. For him, unsettling settled expectations about political theory means, inverting Nietzsche, the courage of a conviction to announce the death of the future. Gunnell contends that "the theorist is a destroyer of illusion,"²⁵ and the illusion he aims to destroy is the pretense that the gap between imagination and the social world can be transcended. Gunnell demands recognition of the incongruities of:

a society where everyone engages in predicting the future; where there are continual threats of disaster that go far beyond the command of normal comprehension; where the media compresses the universe so that the distinctness of the dimensions of time is lost and the significance of events is levelled; where all kinds of extreme social criticism and outrageous speculation, and even bizarre action, become commonplace and are received with little sanction; and where the number of published works condemn almost any written treatise to a short period of recognition.²⁶

Thereby he pushes toward apparent inconsolation and inevitable nihilism.

Accordingly, theorists should find it impossible to give political meaning to these events. In the open society, the political theorist's imagination "aims at *nothing* and achieves *nothing*."²⁷ Thus, "one simply lacks any reason for convincing oneself that there is a . . . world" for political theory, while at the same time "the world looks valueless."²⁸ Seeing the world according to aspirations of the heroic political theorist entails a devalued perception of contemporary life, along with a realization that those aspirations are

today a deceit. In a world where everything is happening, a world of no politics and of "values" without criteria, any conviction that the deeds of the political theorist can matter is a weakness. Strength comes in resigning oneself to the truth that political theory is nearly useless and meaningless. In the open society, everything is permitted, and it makes no difference what the political theorist imagines. Ultimately, from perspectives of political theory, nothing has worth. In the end, which is now, I would think that there ought to be silence.

III

If there were not another side to Gunnell, a side far less ironic about the gap between (political) theory and practice, we would be confronted with the philosophical and polemical problems associated with reacting to, if not defending against, the vengeance of a nihilist vision. Fortunately, however, Gunnell presents a shift in emphasis from sociology to epistemology; and this permits a more oblique approach to the gap. It has been written that "the experience of [nihilism] . . . generates both revolution and reform. It generates reform, where reform is possible, when the myth upon which abuses rest is shattered by honesty."²⁹ So, whereas Gunnell the nihilist revolutionary seeks to (re)declare the death of the political-theoretical imagination, Gunnell the reformer says to cast off our epistemological blinders in pursuit of better connections between theory and practice.

Here Gunnell's purpose is to be "honest" about the gap between theory and practice by setting straight the ontological status of both. At this point, matters become confusing, interesting, and disturbing. Part of the confusion arises from the fact that Gunnell appears to reserve his sociological description of the gap between political theory and practice for descriptions of the history and the philosophy of political thought, as academic enterprises. Logically, a science of politics seems to run into the same difficulties as its counterparts in history and philosophy; but there is no evidence that Gunnell thinks about the former in that way. Consequently, the shift to epistemological matters represents not only another level for explaining contemporary political studies but a dividing line. Whereas nonscientific theory of politics is apparently lost in a nihilist's revolutionary sentiment against it, scientific theory of politics (what Gunnell calls "action theory") is allowed a future.

Nonscientific theory is in dire epistemological shape because of a failure to realize that its standing as an academic activity is structured within a mythical perception of the connection between thought and political reality.³⁰

It suffers from a settled expectation that the past (of political theory) has direct relevance to the present.³¹ This is "the myth of the tradition." "Academic convention selects a basic repertoire of classic works, extending at least from Plato to Marx, arranges them chronologically, infuses them with evolutionary significance, and treats them as a preconstituted tradition which, for better or worse, culminates in modern political theory and practice.

The tradition is mythical because it is a fiction of the historical imagination of writers from Dunning to Wolin. "The existence of the tradition is not something which is demonstrated in these works but something which the authors assume, or at least count on their audience assuming."³³ Rather than phenomena of history, conceptions of the tradition are devices of rhetoric, art, philosophy, or pedagogy, designed primarily to criticize modern politics.

Such conceptions are "pathological" for two reasons. First, they are bad history. According to Gunnell, it is "simply a mistake"³⁴ to say that there is any tradition "which can be traced backward and causally related to contemporary politics."³⁵ Second, it is unpolitical or antipolitical. Its pretense at political criticism notwithstanding, Gunnell claims that "what is striking about this literature is its lack of any very concrete contact with the problems of existential politics and its failure to say very much about the character of political phenomena as such. Despite its occasional concern with a modern crisis, the vocation of the historian of political theory has little to do with understanding contemporary politics."³⁶ In other words, the myth of the tradition is not only bad history but bad politics as well. I suppose, although Gunnell nowhere says this, that to maintain the myth of the tradition is more than self-delusion: it is a kind of bad faith, a failure to engage the world on its own terms. As such, it is based upon a compulsion for form and unity despite the formlessness of the open society. Ironically, the myth runs contrary to conditions in the open society, since the epistemology of the myth is an attempt to impose on the future a past that cannot stick.

The epistemological problems with scientific studies are equally serious but perhaps not as fatal. Here the culprit is "the myth of theory," appropriated from philosophical treatments of science and epistemology. The myth of theory is a product of settled expectations about what counts as good theory. According to Gunnell, these are so confused as to limit severely the potential of the discipline of political science for any connection with political reality. Generally, political science entertains a conception of theory that is a "metatheoretical invention rooted in various doctrines derived from epistemology, methodology, and a fascination with various forms of philosophical transcendentalism."³⁷ Consequently, in contesting

this "scientific" (actually philosophical) idea of theory, even nonscientific political theory has "tended to become a residue of arguments in academic philosophy."³⁸ "The difficulty is that philosophy has become the source of the self-understanding,"³⁹ not only of the social sciences but also of the humanities. Hence, whatever their stripe, political theorists have themselves to blame for their epistemological quandary.

According to Gunnell, epistemological studies tend to become a substitute for substantive theories of social phenomena. Basically, the myth of theory is the mistaken view that needs for interpreting the social world can be met by arguments about how to go about knowing the social world. Gunnell joins the complaint of A.R. Louch that epistemology or "methodology exercises its perverse influence by disguising itself as theory."⁴⁰ In Gunnell's own words, "epistemology sometimes distorts the political object, but mostly it simply directs attention away from it. This is done on the assumption that the relationship between the knower and the object is problematical, not the object itself."⁴¹

Gunnell's aim in unsettling these settled expectations is redolent of phenomenological arguments (with intentions at home in Max Weber) to return to the datum (of the social world) itself. Hence, he directs attention to the "concrete and spatio-temporally circumscribed realm of activity which has been preinterpreted and defined by social actors. . . . It is this preinterpreted realm of politics that is the object of political [studies] and cannot be ignored in the explanation of political action."⁴²

For theory to be good theory, there must be a much closer relationship between the knower and the object than currently exists. Intimacy, knowledge undetached from social reality, requires action theory: an ontology of the structure of action, both linguistic and nonlinguistic, within systems of socially constructed meaning.⁴³ Gunnell says it requires that we "distinguish between the conventional act as an object in the world and as something which has conventional meaning, between what the actor does and what the actor means to do in performing a conventional act, between what the actor intends to do by doing what is done and how this intention is understood, and between the intentional act (or the action as a whole) and what one may mean to do or cause to happen by performing the action."⁴⁴

Here phenomenology and ordinary-language philosophy are forged to ground academic theory in the "political ideology" of ordinary life.⁴⁵ By this, Gunnell means that "political action is a species or conventional form of temporally and spatially founded action."⁴⁶ Language of this kind is meant to press several interrelated epistemological and ontological points.

The appeal to ideology is meant to emphasize that theoretical attention ought to be given to the terms and values which permit ordinary actors

"to know how to perform politically."⁴⁷ In this respect, Gunnell's continued references to time and space are directed by impulses empirical and positivistic (in the phenomenological sense). The empirical side is that criteria for understanding the social world cannot be divorced from the practical situations that prompt them. Appeals to transcultural or transhistorical criteria (such as stipulative definitions of politics or the myth of the tradition) favor postures of transcendence and universalization. They violate Gunnell's stipulation that theory be grounded in immanent phenomena. Gunnell's empirical impulse follows interpretive sociologies deriving from Max Weber. They "place a heavy reliance on the intuitions of the native speaker."⁴⁸ But of course, they do not exclude the interpretations of the investigator.⁴⁹

Actor and observer are bridged by the phenomenological positivism of action theory. Explanation and evaluation must be tied to the substantive facts of conventional objects. Gunnell wants to unsettle the settled expectation that "theories are essentially somewhat arbitrary intellectual constructs applied to, and evaluated, in terms of their utility for dealing with . . . data."⁵⁰ As political ideologies, sound theories are based upon "irreducible claims about the constitution of the world, and provide an ontology of the facts that inhabit it."⁵¹ Accounts that only or primarily concern "knowing about"⁵² how to study the social world fail to be substantive theories. "To describe, explain, or evaluate something is to appeal, at least implicitly, to an articulation of what kind of thing it is."⁵³ This is what Gunnell means by "theory." Thus, a theory is not "merely a functional construct for finding one's way about in the world."⁵⁴

This insistence on the givenness of the preinterpreted realm (sometimes referred to as the "symbolic or interpretive realm"⁵⁶) is a "subtle positivism."⁵⁷ Gunnell implies that there is nothing but the data (of conventional objects). In phenomenological terms, the data are the *Lebenswelt*; while in ordinary-language philosophy, they are speech acts, grammars, intentions, and conventions. It is noteworthy that both these intellectual camps have influenced Gunnell and that they coincide neatly with his view of social facts. The phenomenological positivism of action theory stresses the need to get the facts straight by getting at the world as it really (i.e., conventionally) is. Such a stance is antagonistic to views which fail to recognize and accept the implications of an open society. It also threatens any justification of the myths of both tradition and theory, because it requires grounding theoretical imagination in irreducible data of ordinary life. So theory as political ideology limits the scope of academic inquiry, and action theory is good (academic) theory precisely because it accepts such limits.

IV

The issue is: what is the political universe beneath Gunnell's subtle positivism? The answer to that question lies in his ontology of conventional objects as the irreducible data (*Gegebenheiten*) of social inquiry. In a recently published paper on action theory,⁵⁸ Gunnell tries to detail what counts as conventional objects and their study. There he appears to borrow heavily from speech-act theory (Searle and Austin) in order to define the preconstituted world as the facts concerning structures of human action, which is composed of physical acts, grammar, social facts, conventions, and the consequences of actions.⁵⁹

At the core of Gunnell's action theory is the philosophical principle that conventions constitute the structure of purposive behavior. The intentions embodied in such behavior are a matter of acting according to linguistic rules and principles.⁶⁰ Several ontological oxen get gored here, but the one most directly tied to Gunnell's political universe is expressed in his distinction "between designations and descriptions of actions."⁶¹ Not easily accessible for those unversed in the metaphysical debates about the philosophy of action, this distinction carries with it a daunting set of issues; and I know of no way to avoid struggling with them.

Gunnell's ontology of social action requires a distinction between designations and descriptions. It is the basis for claiming that what social science should investigate is the irreducible data of conventional objects. Thus, social science concerns the social construction of intentions, beliefs, reasons, and so on, *e.g.*, the idea that intentions are linguistic phenomena and that their meanings are matters of conventional action. Accordingly, the distinction between designations and descriptions is a rejection of two alternate social ontologies or conceptions of human action: "that every statement about an action reduces to a description of some basic physical act and . . . that what action has been performed, or how many, is simply relative to an observer's concern."⁶² In other words, Gunnell's distinction is deployed against reductionism and relativism.

The argument against reductionism relates directly to the issue of "temporally and spatially founded action." Some contend that all action can be reduced to "events" or "primitive actions" which are (mere) movements of the body.⁶³ Therefore, every action, no matter how complex, would be a nonrepeatable (but observable) physical act. Philosophically (*i.e.*, ontologically) central to this view are the claims that physical agents are primary in the relationship of agents to actions.

Such claims are doubly incompatible with Gunnell's position. First, they overemphasize the agent and slight grammar, social facts, semantics, among others. As supposed components of action, the latter are repeatable

phenomena, for they are constituted by systems of linguistic rules and principles which the (nonrepeatable) actor engages or performs within when acting. Second, they deny the composite character of action. Instead, they orient inquiry toward a search for some single, basic datum to explain action. This encourages the idea that actions can be explained with little or no regard to context, reducing the significance of time and place. Contesting both moves, Gunnell claims that "statements about actions . . . can have more than one description although not more than one correct designation."⁶⁴

A designation specifies what an action is as a linguistic and nonlinguistic phenomenon. Thus, designations are the irreducible data of social inquiry. They indicate the preconstituted facts about conventional objects. A correct designation of an action takes into account its various components, satisfying the principle that an action cannot always be reduced to any one component. Sometimes the basic datum of an action is a physical act, but other times it is a semantic rule. For a particular action, which component is the basic datum "is either a matter of where it stands in a conventional context and/or a matter to be decided by some kind of criteria imposed by an observer."⁶⁵ The latter proviso allows that, for theoretical reasons, observers sometimes focus on intentions and other times on effects, conventions, or any other component of actions. But a proper designation always indicates a positive fact, for it is circumscribed by phenomenological evidence of the components of conventional objects.

From Gunnell's perspective, descriptions appear to depend altogether on the values or interests of the investigator.⁶⁶ Descriptions differ from designations in two major respects: descriptions may not even identify the preconstituted facts about conventional objects, and descriptions are not single and univocal but infinite and multivocal. While Gunnell's action theory insists on a subtle positivism of designations, founding good theories in facts about conventional objects, it is altogether open-ended and relativistic at the level of descriptions.

The split between designations and descriptions bears on issues about will, causality, intentions, responsibility, and moral culpability. Gunnell has addressed some of these issues; but of more importance here is his epistemological and methodological position that action theory, as a substantive philosophy of social reality, provides "meaning and coherence" for the languages of both politics and political inquiry through criteria "for evaluating or challenging conflicting ontological assumptions or tacit theories of action and political reality."⁶⁷ At this point, Gunnell's subtle positivism seems not so subtle.

By their very infinity and separation from designations, descriptions cannot adjudicate conflicts on ontology or theory. Only designations have the descriptive and prescriptive power for this. This makes them not only

the entrance tickets to social reality but also standards for resolving competing *political* claims. This notion of self-adjudicating designations is remarkable, particularly in light of another claim that "action theory," like other ontologies, "can be rejected or replaced" by competing ones.⁶⁸ Then the question is what kind of argument Gunnell can give to justify his claims about designations. He has given no explicit response, but the intimations and implications of one can be gleaned from the very idea of singular designations.

The idea of singular designations seems necessary for Gunnell to stay away from reductionism and relativism. But its implications for political analysis are confusing and unsettling. To date, Gunnell's action theory is insufficient to render real its promise of adjudicatory power. What does it mean to say that knowledge of designations can resolve competing ontological assertions? Does it herald the old behaviorist claim that science provides a systematic network of terms and expressions for testing political theories against the data? Is there, behind a subtle positivism, the empiricist's goal of regularizing theory by discovering the naturally fixed patterns of action?

Admittedly, I am not sure. There is a danger of overinterpreting Gunnell's claims here. So far, his efforts have been therapeutic, and his inchoate remarks about action theory more critical than positional. Thus he has addressed the philosophy of action, which struggles with problems such as whether an action is an event and what is the meaning of switching on a light, putting on the brakes of an automobile, or raising one's hand. It is quite a step from such philosophical issues, dominated by physical components, to complexities of intentions and conventions of political action. Early applications of action theory have been devoted to overcoming "the poverty of theory" in political science by laying foundations and hoping to strengthen them.⁶⁹ Hence, it is slightly unfair and even dangerous to take issue with the whole structure at this point. Gunnell asserts that "the theory of action is an interdisciplinary concern—both among the humanities and social sciences, and between these disciplines and philosophy."⁷⁰ Surely this underscores the difficulty of guessing what is meant by his avowedly preliminary writing on these matters. Nonetheless, his remark regarding adjudication seems so exceptional in light of the settled expectation that competing political ontologies are deeply incommensurable, that the ultimate power of designations cannot be left unexplored.

V

Perhaps Gunnell's claim is modest. Action theory might provide meaning and coherence through something like Wittgenstein's ground-clearing

exercises, curing political theory of its most egregious errors. Some evidence of this is implicit in Gunnell's writings, although nothing compelling enough for citation. Nonetheless, it makes some sense. On this interpretation, action theory helps to define what things are and how to divide them into various categories: intentions, grammatical rules, and the rest. Yet it cannot answer comprehensive value questions about better and worse political theory. As conceptual analysis, action theory could be as fragmented as Wittgenstein's language games or as systematic as Austin's linguistic phenomenology. But either way, it entails immense interdisciplinary spadework about linguistic and nonlinguistic action.

In this modest interpretation, designations are indicators of the ontological and epistemological primacy or superiority of ordinary linguistic expressions and human action. Then Gunnell's posture on adjudication amounts to a declaration that any *political* theory resisting the sovereignty of conventional objects lacks ontological pedigree. Thus, the only theories vulnerable to immediate and definitive knock-out would be those lacking such references. After dismissing theories detached from the preconstituted realm, serious debate would ensue among ontologically legitimate theories (those having such references). This would entail, for example, that both Gunnell's action theory and its reductionist competitors could be candidates for the groundwork of political analysis. As long as references are found to the preconstituted realm, politics or the growth of knowledge (or some substitute) must determine which counts as the superior view.

On this view, inquiry emerges as an effort to specify and substantiate philosophical, scientific, and humanistic conceptions of conventional objects. Political theories would be rejected, replaced, and refined on the basis of advances in understanding the latter, along with the whole range of reasons that such things happen. Thus, the question regarding adjudicatory power is premature: on the modest view, so much spadework remains to be done on designations that its implications can be left to the future.

This picture is appealingly neat: It meets Gunnell's goal of unsettling expectations, since it portrays most contemporary political studies as suffering early and definitive knock-outs. It also accommodates the reformist side of his philosophy of political inquiry, since political philosophy has always shown a greater concern than political science for destroying illusions and transforming reality. Gunnell writes that, "in the past thirty years," political science "has probably been closer to political objects than most political theory which looked at politics through lenses of philosophy. . . . No matter how unreflective, confused, restricted, or incorrect, some mainstream political scientists have at least tried to say something about political things and about what exists politically."⁷¹ For Gunnell, political science after the fashion of action theory will be closer still to politics, because starting with

the preconstituted universe ordains a superior relationship between theory and practice.

Thus does the neat little picture also bring us back to the relationship between political theory and the open society. Action theory's insistence that politics is a spatio-temporal phenomenon is meant to warn us away from stipulative definitions. Conventional objects and/or observers' views of those objects determine what counts as politics. Informed by theoretical designations of action, will political science then find that the open society, as a "socially constituted and identified symbolic form," shows precious little of a political nature?⁷² Does action theory confirm an eclipse of the public realm by revealing the grammar, semantics, and social conventions of privatistic intentions? That, of course, is a loaded question which, despite the contrary of the preceding picture, is meant to urge again the issue of how designations can be singular and determinate.

The open society must be confirmed as a symbolic form by Gunnell's version of action theory in order for his arguments against the myth of the tradition to have scientific or philosophical validity. If it is confirmed, then reformed political science takes on awesome potential. Theoretical designations could indicate types of actions, intentions, and conventions that can only be apt for an open society. What is political is an empirical matter (or a theoretical matter, in the sense of an ontology embedded in the practices of ordinary social action); therefore, investigations of preconstituted facts via designations should show the incorrigibility of any political theory which fails to take the open society into account. But the logic of this possibility is less than clear.

To make the case more general, without changing its status, consider such ideologies as Marxism, socialism, liberalism, conservatism, and republicanism. Their similarities to one another notwithstanding, Gunnell presumably would contend all of them to be "incommensurable theories of social life."⁷³ Surely at least one version of each ideology (or ontology) would designate something about action. If even the more modest brand of action theory can confirm the existence of those action patterns claimed by Gunnell for the open society, ought action theory not also be able to decide some of the conflicting claims of these competing ontologies?

With action theory as a ground-clearing exercise, the determination of singular designations purportedly indicates which conventional elements are basic to what actions and when. This possibility bespeaks, not only a subtle positivism based on the premise that theoretical claims should be evaluated through observation of conventional objects, but also an ontological conservatism. Adjudication by action theory is meant to push (back?) all observers' descriptions and interpretations into the preconstituted realm. The inclination of action theory would be to challenge those theories

which depart most from the data of ordinary life. As inquiry moves away from conventional objects, the burden of proof increasingly is to justify how and why such theoretical positions are not detached from reality. At one level, to be sure, there is nothing especially troublesome in this. For example, if inquiry into the preconstituted realm indicates that a particular nonlinguistic act is "voting," any political theory denying that designation would be vulnerable to attack for getting a designation wrong.⁷⁴ In this way, action theory adjudicates in order to keep political theories from missing the commonsense of practices in everyday life.

But then the question is whether isolating and identifying actions from the flow and confusion of performance is as simple as such an illustration suggests. Gunnell admits that designations are as much a matter of the theoretical concerns of the observer as they are of the conventions of a particular community of action or performance. If this is true, then might competing political ontologies not posit competing indications of what components (*e.g.*, grammatical, semantic, or social) are basic to a specific action in a particular context? Even when there is agreement about the constitution of an action (*i.e.*, the combination of semantic, grammatical, and social conventions), disagreements may remain regarding the distribution of its elements (*i.e.*, which conventions have greater weight in characterizing an action). Because it seems inevitable that competing political ontologies have just such distributive differences, it appears to me inevitable that designations would be incommensurable. In particular, an observer's ideological concerns would generate competing identifications of the composition of action. But this whole problem is not unique to Gunnell's distinction between designations and descriptions. Nor is it specific to the inevitable gap between the data of conventional objects and theoretical expectations of prejudices of observers. Arguably, it is instead a general problem for any effort to explain action with linguistic philosophy.⁷⁵

Gunnell is generally at one with linguistic philosophy in starting with a postulation of irreducible givens as acts, whether linguistic or nonlinguistic. Then linguistic philosophy rightly notices that these positive phenomena of ordinary life are not immediately accessible to either ordinary actors or investigators. Data must be interpreted, albeit without doing violence to structures of meaning and significance in ordinary life. Responding to this challenge, linguistic philosophy recommends that inquiry isolate the conventions involved, in order to translate observations into understanding.

Initially, this recommendation appears promising rather than problematic. Once again, however, there is a gap between expectations and reality. This program begins by focusing on a particular action by a particular person (or group). Next the program turns to the action's context and content. But how is the investigator to know the context and the content?

Gunnell asserts that "an action is both meaningful (understandable) and expressible, because its performance belongs to a public social context."⁷⁶ In other words, specific actions are understood from the perspectives of conventional objects. Even so, Gunnell also sees the need to distinguish between "what the actor does and what the actor means to do in performing a conventional act."⁷⁷ This implies a difference between performances within a conventional context and what the actor intended by them. While conventions may be necessary for understanding what an actor is doing, they may not be sufficient (or even, in the extreme, relevant) for understanding what an actor intends.

Therefore, claims regarding intentional actions require references both to a public context (i.e., conventions) and to a specific event (i.e., intentions independent not just of the consequences but of the conventions). This exacerbates the problem of sustaining singular designations. If intentions embedded in the structure of action do not exhaust descriptions of a specific actor's intentions, then some conceptual framework must be devised to complete the job. This encourages the alternate view that there is a range of conflicting designations related to competing ontologies of politics or social life. For example, agreement about what counts as the public context of such an action as voting still allows advocates of competing ontologies to posit different elements of that action to explain what counts as the actor's intentions. Although Gunnell does not attend in detail to actual inquiry into politics, perhaps I should add that recognition of this remaining room for variation is behind the (sometimes inadequate) insistence of political scientists on survey rather than aggregate data in the study of voting. Attending only to conventional contexts, which is decently consistent with reliance only on aggregate data, is sufficient to regulate interpretation of what actors are doing.

The duality of the requirement and the plurality of observers' perspectives in executing the requirement both push political inquiry toward a sort of relativism. There appears no way of avoiding such relativism in linking an understanding of public contexts to specific (spatio-temporal manifestations of) actions. Competing political ontologies will, for political reasons, isolate one or another component of an action as basic in order to complete needed connections between societies' conventions and actors' intentions. I do not insist that such relativism is bad but only that it must be admitted and that its implications should be addressed in careful detail.

Consequently, Gunnell's program is at least incomplete. The hope for singular designations is unlikely to be fulfilled, and the touchstones of context and content for action are not enough to evaluate claims in political theory. Even if every designation were to emphasize a different component in identifying actions, every one would possess Gunnell's ticket of admission

to the arena of good ontological theories, for each could refer to the preconstituted realm.

That designations are likely to be multiple and incommensurate, rather than singular and determinate, need not disqualify action theory from adjudicating conflicts in interpreting what actions are. Relativity could be overcome if positive knowledge of the constituent elements of conventional objects is sufficient to settle disagreements about what is basic and how public conventions and individual intentions are to be connected. At first guess, though, only reductionisms appear capable of such power, and Gunnell (rightly) rules them out. An already mushy action theory simply disintegrates under the heat of ontological conflict. But if action theory cannot provide ontological check on political theories, then it has no more claim on us than any other abstract philosophy of inquiry. It is only another (no less interesting or promising) metatheory in the parade of perversely irrelevant metatheories that Gunnell sees moving down the streets of academic political science. Action theory is simultaneously business as usual and the usual avoidance of real business.

To have Gunnell's action theory pulled away from any strong adjudicatory role in regard to political ontologies should not be disappointing. Political ontologies are probably too deeply incommensurate for such strong adjudication in any event. And surely linguistic analysis has been hinting at more than it can deliver. But neither point is now the issue. Instead, I have tried to show how Gunnell's notion of designations lends itself to interpretations which call into question his conclusions for the future of theoretical inquiry into politics. The ontological neutrality of singular designations which Gunnell requires for inclusion among qualified political theories operates only at the most basic and modest level, if at that. Of course, he might say that this is sufficient to discount most contemporary theories from political contention. Gunnell does, in fact, suggest that most political theories are detached or alienated from the fundamental reality of preconstituted objects. Even so, that says more about the poverty of contemporary theory than the descriptive or prescriptive power of action theory.

VI

As articulated, then, action theory does not and cannot deliver the requisite goods. Perhaps a different articulation is in order; but at a minimum, Gunnell's expectations about the overall potential of action theory should be unsettled. He may yet be able to excite even me with its promise. But what would lead anyone to want to believe in such a program in the first

place? To answer that, I return at last to the main issue: Gunnell's political universe. Still my arguments are sketchy, for I must work more from intuitions than evidence.

For political inquiry, Gunnell prescribes both a revolution in non-scientific theory (pulling away from the myth of the tradition) and a reform in scientific theory (pushing toward action theory). As pursued by Gunnell, these two projects come together in addressing the open society. Given the goals which Gunnell attributes to nonscientific theory and the features which he asserts of the open society, ironism seems to be the favored posture toward politics. With heroic political theory dead, nothing remains but the role of the resigned aristocrat, to describe its conventional structure. Is action theory then the science of resigned aristocracy? It describes and evaluates action as immanent in the preconstituted realm of ordinary experience. And this is the very realm which designates open society by the features of legitimate claims that the political has been lost.

The purpose of action theory is not to transform the world but to produce descriptions and evaluations accurate enough to rule out ontologically inferior theories. Gunnell's action theory is, although inchoate, still sufficient to rule out one kind of political theory as failing to refer to the preconstituted realm. That is none other than transformational theories, which ignore immanent facts in order to stipulate "the political" for the sake of some theoretical art. Does Gunnell's deep desire to replace the myth of the tradition with action theory and his rendition of the crisis of the open society derive, not only from his ontological conservatism of designations, but more deeply from his political conservatism of resigned aristocracy?

Gunnell's attacks on myths of theory and tradition have the direct effect of conceptual and the indirect effect of political conservatism. In both respects, one implication of Gunnell's criticisms is that academic political inquiry suffers from pretenses of doing more and other than it does. This may be the deep spur to his hostilities. Gunnell's notions of action theory and the open society are mainly buttresses for the argument that political theory must not be transcendent. Whether justified by social fact or therapeutic epistemology, his demand for immanence stands primarily as a constraint against theories aiming to transform political reality. Those who invest in the archaeology of action theory will be long in digging out conventional objects, before they can even entertain the idea of leaping upward to transforming political visions. Such visions are not forbidden to action theory, but they are barred until the facts about conventional objects are extracted. A cursory reading of the literature in philosophy is enough to know that a long wait is in store.

Gunnell's arguments for action theory imply that contemporary political criticism is groundless, nothing more than the personal policy predilections of unconstrained imaginations. Disgusted with the open society, which tolerates these groundless pseudosocial theories, Gunnell sees a Hobbesian gap between the worth or market value of political criticism and the worthiness of such sound political science as action theory. In a sense, transformational theories are not only anachronistic but a dime a dozen.

In Gunnell's ontological conservatism lurks a Weberian demand for objectivity. Gunnell's concern for conventional objects echoes Weber's interest in careful explication of the meaning systems of social actors. Gunnell's insistence that political things are bound by space and time is a version of Weber's requirement that explanation take into account the flux of social events. Gunnell's distinction between designations and descriptions is an action-theory version of Weber's ideal types, in that both are designed to overcome much the same set of problems in making the structure of social reality comprehensible.

Similarly, Gunnell's politics are as hard as Weber's to classify in standard ideological terms, and for much the same reasons. Both share a sensibility of political decline, expressed in Gunnell's portrait of the open society and Weber's diagram of bureaucracy. Gunnell's insistence that descriptions of reality are "essentially inexhaustible"⁷⁸ parallels Weber's view that the tempest of time is irrational, without essential meaning. Either man could have asked: "if there is any such 'meaning' . . . along what road could one come upon its tracks?"⁷⁹ For Weber, the social scientist is like the night watchman of the Old Testament Psalms who could discern only events immanent in the world. In precisely the same spirit, Gunnell declares the death of heroic imagination in political theory on grounds that our world is one where everyone predicts everything. For Gunnell, the student of politics is limited to the philosophical and scientific spadework of analyzing social conventions.

Every such similarity suggests that Gunnell shares Weber's ironic view of social science as a continual struggle to say, much less do, anything meaningful about its subjects. In fact, Gunnell's writings read even more pessimistically than Weber's. Gunnell offers scarcely any trace of even the remotest hope that academic studies, let alone political actions, may achieve positive political significance. Gunnell the ironist is adamantly skeptical that transformational theories may make any political difference at all, positive or negative. Absent whatever adjudicatory powers of description or prescription that action theory might attain in the future, reformed political science is for Gunnell the investigation of a society asunder. It is the science of politics and values in a world without criteria.

Action theory is right for this world because it imposes a conceptual conservatism appropriate to our context of production. Once settled expectations are shattered by Gunnell's irony unto nihilism, no ethic is left but expressing doubt and excusing ourselves from saying too much. Action theory mirrors these conditions, for its ultimate justification is a devalued political universe of severely limited possibilities. In turn, all this points to a question which I cannot resolve. Does Gunnell's aristocracy of resignation collapse into a political conservatism, leaving everything the way it is and casting all political criticism into doubt? Or does Gunnell's irony of inquiry contain a radical reminder that, before anything is changed and criticism can matter, meaningful political inquiry must first bring value claims closer to the political facts of our social existence? Perhaps it is both.

Gunnell's writing is deeply parasitic on metatheory, which he deploys with originality in order to challenge us to think about what we are doing when we use philosophy as a foundation for political inquiry. Accordingly, much of what he says is touched off by philosophical skirmishes in academia. This leads me to wonder whether he has ever considered the *political* implications of playing with such argumentative devices as his distinction between designation and descriptions. The apparent ontological and political conservatism implied by his treatment of these issues may be unintended. Despite his objections to instrumentalism, Gunnell's "ontology" may be no more than an unhappy residue of using the authority of philosophical language and questions to take the discipline of political science to task.

From personal experience, I doubt that Gunnell is a political conservative in the sense to be inferred from his writing. But it is there nonetheless. It may be an unwelcome result of failure to take his own advice and make politics primary. Then again, reading Gunnell reminds me of reading the the early Marx. How can the reader be sure of getting the message straight, when the author may himself not yet have it all worked out? Still, even if the false starts are hard to distinguish from the true, the effort is worthwhile because the issues are important.

Notes

*I thank Professor Gunnell for permission to work from draft manuscripts and for his kindness and intellectual support, despite my effort to remake him in my own image. I also thank John Nelson for always hearing me out.

1. Henry S. Kariel, *Saving Appearances*, Belmont, CA, Duxbury Press, 1972, 99.
2. *Ibid.*, 100.
3. *Ibid.*, 102. The remarks which follow are not intended as a criticism of Kariel but as a comprehension of the general phenomenon of irony in political events.

4. Hayden White, *Metahistory*, Baltimore, John Hopkins University Press, 1973, 38.
5. DSCT, 68.
6. In making this assertion, Gunnell relies on the philosophy of science (or intuitions) avowed by those pursuing political science, not on specific criticisms of works in political science. The signal exception to this is his discussion of texts in the history of political thought: PT, 33-59.
7. Gunnell has used both expressions to describe the gap between academic studies and political practice. His clearest account of the nature of the gap is in ISPO, 35: "Just as much academic philosophy of science and epistemology is an alienated product of scientific discourse, academic or metapolitical theory is an alienated reflection of political discourse and the theory embedded in political life. It has had a career of its own, detached from the political issues which first gave rise to it."
8. White, *Metahistory*, 232.
9. One complication in reading Gunnell's writing is that he uses "theory" in at least four ways, to refer to: the views of political practitioners; the academic enterprises of analyzing political practices; the political studies, scientific and non-scientific, which are produced by such academic analyses; and the historical and philosophical studies of political thought, whether practical or academic. Here I use "theory" to apply to all four of Gunnell's meanings.
10. PT, 160.
11. PT, 153.
12. PT, 159.
13. Although Gunnell makes these points only with regard to the history and philosophy of political thought, I am carrying some of these themes over to his other three kinds of theory. The idea is to construct connections implicit in his various conceptions of theory into a composite portrait.
14. PT, 161.
15. PT, 160.
16. Another way to characterize Gunnell's "open society" is to say that it is Karl Popper's "abstract relations" strained beyond their proper limits.
17. PT, 161.
18. PT, 160.
19. PT, 161.
20. Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, Richard D. Heffner, ed., New York, New American Library, 1956, 117.
21. PT, 141.

22. PT, 160.
23. PT, 159.
24. PT, 161.
25. PT, 156.
26. PT, 161.
27. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale, trans., New York, Random House, 1967, 12.
28. *Ibid.*, 13.
29. Michael Novak, *The Experience of Nothingness*, New York, Harper and Row, 1970, 117.
30. It is hard to say whether epistemology *causes* this lack of vision or whether epistemology is itself part of some more encompassing cultural problem.
31. I do not know what Gunnell would say about the position of someone like Eugene F. Miller, who argues that political theories of the past can be employed analogically to understand politics in the present. See: "The Primary Questions of Political Inquiry," *Review of Politics*, 39, 3, July, 1977, 298-331.
32. MT, 131.
33. PT, 68.
34. PT, 66.
35. PT, 90.
36. PhPT, 206.
37. ISPO, 25-26.
38. PhPT, 198.
39. PTTA, 343.
40. A. R. Louch, *Explanation and Human Action*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1969, 11. The positions of Gunnell and Louch invite comparison in many respects.
41. ISPO, 33.
42. PICA, 235.
43. See ISPO, 47. In PICA, the same point is made in terms of "speech and nonlinguistic action," on 243.
44. PTTA, 352.
45. PhPT, 211.
46. PSTA, 89.

47. PhPT, 212. Although Gunnell never says so, this point appears to have its origins in Gilbert Ryle's distinction between "knowing how" and "knowing that." See: *The Concept of Mind*, New York, Barnes and Noble, 1949, 27-31.
48. John R. Searle, *Speech Acts*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1969, 15. As with Louch, the position of Gunnell invites comparison with that of Searle.
49. The issue of "interpretations" by investigators has potential political significance. On page 248 of PICA, Gunnell anticipated that his recommendations that linguistic analysis follow ordinary language philosophy would be seen to have politically conservative overtones. There he contended that, while it may "appear to have conservative or static overtones, . . . this is more a matter of distribution of emphasis than an endemic defect of" the approach. Be that as it may, I argue that there is in Gunnell's position more than a small measure of ontological, if not political, conservatism.
50. PTTA, 344-345.
51. PSTA, 81.
52. PhPT, 212.
53. ISPO, 34.
54. PSTA, 81.
55. Cf. PICA, 271: "The givenness of social phenomena resides in their character as conventional or institutional facts, that is, facts that are not constituted by the rules of another conventional order."
56. PTTA, 357. Cf. PICA, 266: "social reality presents itself as a realm of symbolically informed and expressed behavior, that is, action, where the meaning and significance of particular phenomena ultimately derive from, and are only intelligible in terms of, a context involving a complex configuration of linguistic and nonlinguistic elements."
57. This expression is used to describe the language philosophy of Ludwig Wittgenstein: David Pears, *Ludwig Wittgenstein*, New York, Viking Press, 1969, 184.
58. One problem in writing about Gunnell's writing is that it is a moving target. Many of his themes concerning the structure of social reality and language are presented, or intimated, in PICA. Yet almost every later essay seems to make some subtle shift or find a new nuance on an old theme. In PTTA, for example, Gunnell recovers from the earlier action paper an *en passant* discussion and turns it into a major attack on the action theory of Donald Davidson.
59. There is something unsettling about Gunnell's ability to pair Austin and Searle. For one thing, it is not evident to me that Searle shares the belief of Austin and Gunnell that a philosophical analysis of language ought to lead to scientific knowledge of speech acts. For another, the possibility of nonlinguistic facts is a controversial point in Austin's schema but less so in Searle's. This latter issue concerns what

counts as an illocutionary act. Cf. Keith Graham, "The Recovery of Illocutionary Force," *Philosophical Quarterly*, 30, 2, April, 1980, 141-148, on 142.

60. PTTA, 349-356.

61. PTTA, 351.

62. PTTA, 351.

63. Donald Davidson, *Essays on Actions and Events*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1980, 59.

64. PTTA, 351.

65. PTTA, 349. Note that this is another way of framing the issue of the role of interpretations by an investigator.

66. PTTA, 351-352.

67. PTTA, 358.

68. PSTA, 90.

69. PSTA, 76.

70. PSTA, 89.

71. ISPO, 42.

72. PTTA, 348. Now this expression takes on a more technical meaning than in the past, because Gunnell wants to distinguish among symbolic forms, conventions, and intentions.

73. PTTA, 346.

74. PTTA, 351. This is far from a simple issue.

75. The following remarks are an adaptation of arguments in: Graham, "The Recovery of Illocutionary Force," 146-148.

76. PTTA, 347.

77. PTTA, 352.

78. Max Weber, "Science as a Vocation," in *From Max Weber*, H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills, eds., New York, Oxford University Press, 1958, 142.

79. DSCT, 73. Here Gunnell quotes from: Stuart Hampshire, *Thought and Action*, New York, Viking Press, 1960, 21.

CHAPTER XII

Destroying Political Theory in Order to Save It (Or, John Gunnell Turns on the Western Tradition)

JOHN S. NELSON

We had to destroy the village in order to save it.

—American officer in the Vietnam War¹

In recent books and articles, John Gunnell attacks a set of myths alleged to plague political inquiry: the myth of the given, the myth of science, two myths of theory (in science and in politics), the myth of the tradition, and what could be called the myth of the political. He criticizes the alienation of political theory from substantive inquiry and actual practice. And he exposes the tacit transcendentalism of many current notions of politics, political theory, and political epistemology. Thus, he makes telling points against the foundationalism, instrumentalism, objectivism, and polidolatry rampant in recent studies of politics.

Strangely, though, Gunnell's own positions and distinctions gravitate toward these very same myths, alienations, and transcendentalisms. He deplores the alienation of political inquiry from political practice; yet he seldom mentions, let alone engages, practical politics. He decries the flight of political theory into philosophy and history, away from pressing political issues of our times; but he writes almost exclusively about philosophical and historical issues with little evident tie to present public affairs. He bemoans our lack of substantive studies of politics; yet he does virtually nothing to describe, let alone produce, substantive political theories. He argues that political inquiry has been perverted by misplaced pursuit of epistemology, philosophy of science, metaethics, and other metatheoretical projects; still he writes at a level almost wholly metatheoretical, dealing only in what students of politics say about their methods and never really

touching the actual conduct of political studies. He insists that the West has no historical tradition of political theory, nonetheless he proposes a conception of political theory much like familiar claims for a Western tradition, including worries that "the open society and political theory are incompatible."²

Similarly, Gunnell's alternatives to traditionalism and scientism seem to be constructed of contradictions. He promotes an antipositivist conventionalism; but he grounds it in a logical-positivist dichotomy between descriptions and designations. He invokes an antiempiricist contextualism; but he founds it on a logical-empiricist trichotomy of practical, theoretical, and metatheoretical languages. He evokes an antitranscendental existentialism; but he roots it in an objectivist ontology of action.

What are we to do with this paradoxical project? Dismiss it as incoherent or self-contradictory? Certainly not, for Gunnell teaches us too much about recent political theory, both scientific and humanistic, to allow us to dispense entirely with his work. Salvage some and dump the rest? Probably not, for Gunnell's arguments are too interrelated to save some without attending carefully to all. Criticize and reconstruct it? Possibly, but because many avenues are available for this, depending on our purposes at the moment, we should try first to see the whole of Gunnell's work on its own terms. Discover a hidden coherence and confront it? Yes, yet our pattern must be replete with the paradoxes which proliferate within Gunnell's own work, for otherwise we would only imagine another project in its place.

Perhaps consciously, perhaps not, Gunnell has been engaged in destroying political theory in order to save it. This is the thread that weaves all of his work into a single fabric, if one with edges ragged from incomplete salvage and much use. To some extent, this may also help us comprehend the seemingly incompatible interpretations which his work is bound to provoke. Far from the only way to understand Gunnell's writing, this explication encourages (and to some extent encompasses) a full matrix of other interpretations.

In so describing Gunnell's work, I mean not to deprecate but to liberate it: to find, in the clutter of its letter, the force of its inspiration. Inevitably, this treatment enables us to criticize stringently the various errors and occasional contradictions by Gunnell. Yet it also allows us to prize highly the impetus of his particular positions and to sympathize thoroughly with the heart of his enterprise as a whole. Seeking to free the spirit of that project from surrounding confusions, this translation pays Gunnell the penultimate compliment of self-conscious inspiration. Doing Gunnell's theory of political theory homage in its own terms, I destroy it in order to save it. Deconstructing his project, I display it as a project of deconstruction.

Consequently, I argue that Gunnell undertakes a deconstruction of political theory on behalf of political theory. First, I explain the general idea of deconstruction: summarizing its conditions, dynamics, dangers, and advantages. Second, I trace Gunnell's particular project of deconstruction from his early book on *Political Philosophy and Time* through his much more recent and widely read works on political inquiry. Third, I explore the perplexities which beset Gunnell's endeavor to date. And fourth, I offer corrections consistent with that project's own principles and resources, reconstructing it to be more intelligently mythical and less reluctantly rhetorical.

My main move is to regard the objects of Gunnell's attack as thoroughly modern myths rather than mere mistakes or even primitive myths. In turn, this ties into a reconception of deconstruction as a postmodern myth of alienation. And that leads into a reconstruction of Gunnell's project as a mode of postmodern mythmaking for politics and political inquiry. In the proper spirit of paradox, then, I propose a creative deconstruction of Gunnell's deconstruction of political inquiry. Thus do I seek to return Gunnell's theory of political theory to what, in one sense, it always was: a rhetorical turn on the Western tradition of political inquiry.

BREAK

For whoever would save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.

—Jesus Christ³

The primary paradox of Gunnell's theory of political theory is its project of destruction as salvation. Foreshadowed in his first book, on *Political Philosophy and Time*, this is the earliest of his paradoxes. Yet it also bids fair to be the most basic, controlling, or revealing of his paradoxes. Before exploring this paradox in Gunnell's own writing, however, let me trace its broad contours in other works and concerns of our times. By doing so, I can explain how the paradox of destruction as salvation is the project of deconstruction.

Ours are times shadowed by degeneration, disaster, apocalypse.⁴ This is as much a matter of imagination as of occurrence, of symbol as of fact, of myth as of history. But since both sides slide into one another, I say this more to set a tone than to establish a distinction. Ours are times acutely conscious of the temptations of destruction. As a result, ours are times in which accusations abound of nihilism. For fantasies and fanaticisms of destruction are uncomfortably familiar in our intellectual and political

lives. Eventually, all this may be seen as a sign in support of Gunnell's deconstruction of political theory. But initially, this makes any project of salvation through destruction too easy to dismiss.

Destroying something in order to save it thus seems to us not only plainly self-discrediting or stupidly self-defeating but perversely self-deceiving as well. Certainly that is among the lessons we draw from this essay's first epigraph: the notorious rationalization of a foolish and hellish free-fire zone in Vietnam. Ordinarily, we are right to regard such endeavors as self-deceiving, -denying, -defeating, -destroying. Sometimes, they are measures of cynicism. Whether apathetic or manipulative, such pervasive cynicisms now spawn suspicions of a secret nihilism which slips beneath responsibility into a craving for belief at any and every cost. Other times, these projects testify to ambition unto hubris. Whether directed to political, military, economic, or even personal improvement, such grand ambitions now stir rumors of a tacit nihilism that tends toward destructive absurdity, rather than the instructive audacity or redemptive tragedy expected in earlier eras. Undoubtedly, attempts to save by destorying are acts of desperation. Whether planned or improvised, such devices of desperation now spark concerns of a covert nihilism which careens out of control in refusing to face facts, accept defeats, and limit losses. Undeniably, we are wise to heed these worries.

Still, nihilism seen in every act of destruction is nihilism run rampant and victorious. We need to remember that there are times and ways in which destruction is a positive path to construction. Harder, we need to know (not only in our bones, but also in our minds) that there are times and ways in which destruction is the necessary path to salvation. This is true when one thing is sacrificed to the survival of another: killing for food or clearing to build. It is true when a part is destroyed to save the whole: removing cancers from the body or cutting fire breaks in the forest. It is true, too, when something is destroyed to save it from the pain or onus of self-destruction: they shoot horses, don't they? Yet it is true as well when one thing is transformed into another: the ideal of urban renewal or the struggle of religious rebirth. And when that is the way to preserve or restore the integrity of the original, then in the most complex yet compelling sense we have destroyed something in order to save it. Thus, the second epigraph reminds us that there are positive, transformative ways to practice the paradox of salvation through destruction.

These are the ways of "deconstruction." I borrow this term from literary theory of late. There it has already gained a notoriety of its own, not to mention that reflected back from nihilism. Those familiar with the fireworks of Martin Heidegger, Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, of the Yale School of Literary criticism will know why the term and its associated

techniques are controversial, yet can be discredited as such only with considerable skill (if at all).⁵ Those infatuated with the aphorisms of Friedrich Nietzsche will see how still other projects of our postmodern period are suffused by sensibilities of deconstruction, yet can be disclosed as such only with considerable reluctance (if at all).⁶ Wanting to burden neither my sources nor myself with unduly technical comparisons, however, I restrict my borrowing to inspirations rather than specifics. This is in line with the deconstructive principle of sympathy in analysis.

Initially, deconstruction appears as analysis: dividing an object into component parts.⁷ But some objects are not suitable for deconstruction, not being able to survive such study and assistance. On the one hand, this means that deconstruction is not simple destruction, which either eliminates as an end in itself or eradicates as an unregretted means to some further end. On the other hand, this means that deconstruction is not dissection, which either kills or deals in the already dead in order to understand the living. On the contrary, deconstruction is dedicated to addressing its objects as alive and active subjects: as whole, purposeful creatures open to understanding by analysis conducted through interaction and imitation more than distancing and differentiation. In other words, deconstruction concerns processes of perpetuation, interdependence, and change—not just pieces of inert or geometric existence. Such interests limit analysis and direct it to the interpenetration of known and knower, so that analysis of the other is never disavowed from analysis of the self. This is the deconstructive principle of self-concern.

Thus, some objects are unsuited to deconstruction because they have not been constructed in the first place. Concerned not only with how an object has effects but also with how it is composed (both originally by its creators and repeatedly by its interpreters), deconstruction is inappropriate where reasons and processes of composition are ultimately unfathomable. That is, deconstruction proceeds on the principle that we have no right to take apart what we have not previously put together. Although the “we” can be construed in a variety of ways, deconstruction is principally devoted to comprehending human creations in all their complexity, ambiguity, and even incoherence. This is the deconstructive principle of preconstruction.⁸

Accordingly, the paradigm object of deconstruction is the text. This holds in two senses, for the twin concerns characterizing deconstruction are to study a text and to become a text worthy of study. Even when an object (say a painting, a person, an action, or an ideology) is not regularly regarded or readily recognizable as a text, it is deconstructed as a text.⁹ For the purposes of deconstruction, a text includes its own deconstruction (by the principle of self-concern). This can endanger deconstruction with

autisms or narcissisms of self-concern. But it also can advantage deconstruction with autonomous creativity and necessary self-criticism. For one thing, deconstructive criticism of texts usually seeks to contribute next texts worthy of influence in their own right. For another, it sometimes tries to dissolve the old fabric of a field clotted with canonical texts that keep current practitioners from addressing present problems obscured by previous writings. In both respects, this is the deconstructive principle of self-direction.

Relatedly, the paradigm interests of deconstruction are the ends, means, acts, and *aporias* of a text. The ends of a text encompass the intentions of authors, audiences, and various interlocutors—of which any deconstructor is one. Thus does each deconstruction deconstruct itself, or intend as much. The means of a text include the devices of language and their deployment in relation to one another: in a word, the “tropes.” In literary terms, these are such rhetorical figures as hyperbole, litotes, metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, and irony. But they can never be considered exclusively as matters of language, as the last trope of irony makes unmistakably clear. More generally, the means or tropes of a text are its dynamics of internal and external interaction.¹⁰ The acts of a text span its effects and performances. The former we distinguish as abilities to inform, motivate, communicate, disgust, persuade, and so on. The latter we demarcate as capacities to express, argue, rebuke, promise, propose, and the like. The *aporias* of a text cover its ambiguities, doubts, disclaimers, self-criticisms, incompletions, implications, contradictions, perplexities, paradoxes, and so forth. They also subsume its contexts, pretexts, sources, uses, abuses, etc. In significant ways, the interest of deconstruction lies in tensions and transformations of these ends, means, acts, and doubts. This is the deconstructive principle of *aporia*.

Although any deconstruction flatters its inspiring text, it strives by all of its principles to surpass the initial text. In other words, it seeks a full measure of importance and independence. Often, deconstruction aspires to treatment as a text in its own right.¹¹ On occasion, it even strives for the highest of critical accolades as a master text.¹² Most ambitiously (or absurdly?), Friedrich Schlegel and other German Romantics defined something very much like deconstruction as the mark of a true master text or at least as a necessary condition for abiding literary merit. This standard shows itself today in the tendency of academic critics to interpret great works as preeminently self-reflexive and self-foundational: the great novel as a theory of the novel, the great play as a theory of drama, every great writing as a theory of language, and indeed any great art as an account of its own possibility, production, epistemology, evaluation, and influence. And perhaps they are, in part.

Not surprisingly, even the more humble principle of self-direction offends those who would restrict commentary and criticism to devices for assessing and otherwise calling attention to the primary text. Gunnell censures epistemology for replacing political substance with methodological stricture as the focus of attention. In the same vein, its foes fault deconstruction for supplanting genuine literature with pretentious criticism as the center of appreciation.¹³ Just as Gunnell argues against subordinating theory to metatheory, so dissenters from deconstruction caution against subjugating text (or interpretation) to theory.¹⁴

Undeniably, this is a danger of deconstruction. (indeed, it is evident in the estrangement of Gunnell's own work from any substantive theory of politics. Prerequisites and other preliminaries can preempt the original object.¹⁵ Pretexts and contexts can occlude the initial text. The apparatus of interpretation can overwhelm the work and whatever occasion was supposed for its application. Then there is an airy freedom of lacking, losing, or looking to foundations.¹⁶ Minimally, such spasms of pure possibility can disorient deconstruction, causing it to misplace the text partially or momentarily. More, then can disrupt deconstruction, driving it to displace the text entirely or permanently. (Maximally, though, they can redirect deconstruction, pushing it to replace the text responsibly and creatively.¹⁷) In short, critics of deconstruction accuse it of accomplishing a kind of destruction of its proper (but merely purported) object: the (initial) text. Admittedly, the destruction is always indirect and often incomplete, but it is destruction nonetheless.

Depending on its intentions, deconstruction has several different ways of defending itself against this accusation and the danger from which it stems. Deconstruction is far from the only enterprise tempted to hubris. And this is only a danger, after all, not a necessity. Self-conscious in its aspiration, deconstruction can recognize and respond to incipient hubris more readily and effectively than other endeavors of criticism or creation. The very ability of deconstruction to "destroy" initial texts is mistaken or exaggerated, at least when it is unwarranted. Let us look at actual deconstructions: what proportion are inordinately dangerous in ambition or achievement? And for what reasons? The fact is that a continual concern for foundations, metamoves, and epistemics (like an excessive concern for self) is a fixture of the times: highly inevitable and at least moderately desirable.¹⁸ This must be confronted or worked with, not cast aside or wished away. Insofar as this is the province of deconstruction, then decent criticisms must now be deconstructive in some significant degree. Further, deconstruction is done more skillfully and less dangerously when it is conscious and overt. All of these reposts and apologies could be advanced with some plausibility by advocates of deconstruction.

The response most relevant to Gunnell's work, however, is strikingly different in spirit and specifics. It accepts the attribution of destructive power, not just for particular texts, but for whole traditions. And it defends or even celebrates the application of that power to the case at hand. This is self-conscious deconstruction as liberation (of or even from the text or the canon). Still, it remains a salvation, for construction and deconstruction (the text and its critique) become mutually dependent and defining. This is Paul de Man's point about Nietzsche's deconstruction of Western conceptions of the self. "The deconstruction of the self as a metaphor does not end in the rigorous separation of the two categories (self and figure) from each other but ends instead in an exchange of properties that allows for the mutual persistence at the expense of literal truth."¹⁹ In other words, deconstruction works metaphorically (or more generally, by figuration) to transform (transfigure) the initial text into something new.²⁰ The transportation of properties runs in both directions, by a variety of tropal dynamics.

This is neither simple destruction of the old nor simple creation of the new. Deconstruction transforms the original construction and departs from it. Nonetheless, the product of deconstruction is dependent on the original construction. Superficially, their relationship seems one of total or at least thorough opposition (which is, after all, a kind of dependence). While deconstruction does reverse (deny, destroy) the original, "the reversal from denial to assertion implicit in deconstructive discourse never reaches the symmetrical counterpart of what it denies."²¹

One restriction on deconstructive reversal is its dependence on the initial construct for categories, terms, or judgments. Hannah Arendt emphasized this difficulty or limit in describing the two sets of "turning operations" (deconstructions) which she claimed to have created and then destroyed the Western tradition of political theory and practice.²² Plato had to rely on sophistic and even heroic categories in deconstructing the earlier complex of Greek political culture. (Although Arendt does not put the point quite this way, her account also portrays the Sophists and their immediate predecessors as creating that cultural complex by transforming the meanings and uses of heroic terms and commitments into the first fully political language and practice.) Despite trying, neither Socrates, Plato nor Aristotle could pull away completely from past traditions and terminologies. Instead, the situation required that the three theorists criticize, rebut, and transform the previous ways into new ways—into a cultural complex for the future. The same need to rely on old categories is evident in the turning operations of Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, and Marx, whose efforts to end and replace the Western tradition kept unwinding into the terms, problems, and judgments of the West. Defining their projects in opposition

to the West, these three men were bound to remain dependent on the West, to perpetuate its categories and commitments in memory and judgment. Presumably, Arendt's acute appreciation of this dependence derives from her own attempt (after the fashion of her mentor, Heidegger) to deconstruct the (texts of) the West.

Categories are created in distinctions, and no one side of a distinction can long stand alone. Accordingly, a new term or commitment always begins by paying homage to the old, from which it is distinguished and to which it is added (at least initially). Moreover, the new always continues in hostage to the old, which it may reverse but cannot simply abolish. Yet eventually, the new can wander away from the old, which can be lost. For the new can enter into other distinctions, which endow it with different significance and gradually supplant the old altogether. When purposeful, this change need not be glacial but can occur with considerable rapidity. Even then, though, it is not an overnight transposition. Hence, projects which appear to fail in the short or middle term can more or less succeed in the long run, as the deconstruction continues to free itself from the hold of the first text by making itself into the next text. Thus, is the deconstructive principle of dependence capable of self-qualification.

The principle of dependence qualifies itself in another way as well, for the other side of this interaction is the interpretive dependence of the old text on the new. In this sense, the initial text is a construction in important part because it is construed (constructed) in deconstruction—which helps to make the first text what it is, was, and will be. This implies another restriction on deconstruction: it cannot simply destroy its target, since it is all the while reconstructing it. Thus Arendt and her codeconstructors are partly responsible for constructing the Western tradition as we now know it. More generally, all (human) constructions are to some significant extent the product of deconstructions. This is the deconstructive principle of reconstruction.

On the one hand, the principle of reconstruction means that all construction is significantly retrospective. In other language, this is the point (made by Gunnell, among others) that all traditions are retrospectively constructed. (Unfortunately, Gunnell appears to forget this corollary when it comes to considering the myth of the tradition and the myth of the political; but more about them later.) This corollary of retrospection is responsible for the intertwining of texts and their interpretations, as of conventions and their successors or traditions and their destructions. It puts critiques and replacements within the context of their targets, as counter-cultures or counter-traditions are located within cultures and traditions.

On the other hand, the principle of reconstruction means that all construction involves or calls forth its own deconstruction. As de Man deconstructed Nietzsche to show, "deconstruction is not something we can decide to do or not to do at will. It is coextensive with any use of language, and this use is compulsive or, as Nietzsche formulates it, imperative."²³ In a way, Hegel himself made this point, insisting that every synthesis as acted out becomes a new thesis and thus must eventually elicit its own antithesis. Deconstruction is more complicated than this, but it remains needed and inevitable for construction—in something approaching the sense in which each synthesis calls forth its own criticism. This corollary of self-deconstruction is undoubtedly the deconstructors' finest reply to their detractors.

The breaks, turns, or reversals of deconstruction operate primarily at the levels of tropal dynamics in order to transform old terms, judgments, and commitments into new ones. This is why I call them rhetorical turns and regard deconstruction as an emphatically rhetorical enterprise. Because they are addressed to cultural complexes of symbols, I am also comfortable calling them mythic turns: they seek to transform particular myths or whole *mythoi*. Since myths are not merely systematic mistakes, to talk in terms of mythic turns is to underscore the complicated and (in a sense) incomplete nature of destruction in the service of salvation or transformation. For old myths are easily seen to live on in the new, even when their revisions and reversals are very evident. Indeed, Samuel Delany maintains (with some merit) that "in myths things always turn into their opposites as one version supersedes the next."²⁴

Of course, the mythic senses of opposition are not limited to the usual logics of contradiction and contrariness. This is because the mythic senses are as multiplicitous as the tropes themselves, all of which turn on the opposition of figural to literal language. Plainly, this principle of mythical opposition or rhetorical reversal is central to the most daring deconstructions, which could scarcely proceed without it. Even in more domesticated deconstructions, though, it is ignored only at peril to text and interpretation alike. (This is why I enjoin Gunnell and others to a greater mythical and rhetorical self-consciousness in their deconstructive endeavors.)

Through all these dynamics, deconstruction is the mirror effort or effect of dialectic. Just as dialectical negation of the negation is not a simple return, recovery, or repositing of the first affirmative moment (the thesis), so deconstructive negation of the creation is not a simple pole, opposite, or reversal of the former affirmative moment (the construction).²⁵ Thus, dialectic and deconstruction meet in a fourth dialectical moment or movement or irony, which could be called the project of *aporia* or even the specific moment of deconstruction.²⁶ Moving from thesis to antithesis to synthesis, dialectic is tempted to rest—as Hegel knew, except perhaps in

his most smug and complacent moments. To move further, dialectic must question itself. The synthesis must be criticized, to be sure, but deconstruction insists that this does not complete the questioning. The whole dialectic must be scrutinized: the steps retraced and reconstructed, the ends reiterated and readdressed, the means reconceived and redirected, the terms revised and replaced, the dialectician rebuked and repudiated.

In the end, dialectic is deconstructed (is deconstruction). And eventually, deconstruction becomes radical (becomes destructive). Whether despite or because of its original intentions, deconstruction destroys something of the earlier dialectic by insisting that its components be treated as moments or movements, not straightforward truths (let alone final attainments). It portrays them as posited, as positions rather than fixtures, lest they become fixations. This is the deconstructive principle of destruction.

In the end, though, deconstruction is dialectical (is dialectic). Thus, eventually, deconstruction itself becomes positional (becomes constructive). Whether despite or because of its original intentions, deconstruction saves something of the earlier dialectic by insisting that its components be addressed, even if in criticism. Whatever its particular purposes, then, deconstruction proceeds by transforming the original text into a new one. Since each text invites its own deconstruction and thereby encourages the related construction of next texts, Stanley Cavell is correct in claiming that "a measure of the quality of a new text is the quality of the texts it arouses."²⁷ Weaving together this complex succession and interaction of texts, we can conceive traditions as continuing transformations which we can end and begin anew.²⁸ That is, both construction and deconstruction are traditional and transformational. Deconstruction transforms traditions; construction traditionalizes transformations. Need I say that this is the deconstructive principle of transformation?

TURN

This path to the answer to our question is not a break with history, no repudiation of history, but is an adoption and transformation of which has been handed down to us. Such an adoption of history is what is meant by the term "destruction." . . . Destruction means—to open our ears, to make ourselves free for what speaks to us in the tradition as the Being of being.

—Martin Heidegger²⁹

As transformation, deconstruction does not seek mere understanding or sheer destruction of its object. Deconstruction digs up the dirt and cuts into the fruit of established traditions in order to locate, situate, stimulate,

and nourish the seeds of successive traditions.³⁰ Of course, the seeds themselves are products of the established traditions. To seek the seeds or sources of existing traditions is, in a sense, to destroy them. Yet in another sense, it is to save and start them anew. The retention of traditions requires reattention to them. In turn, this involves their revival and revision. Deconstructing a relevant passage in Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*, Cavell comments that "what feels like destruction, what expresses itself here in the idea of destruction, is really a shift in what we are asked to let interest us, in the tumbling of our ideas of the great and the important, as in conversation."³¹

This is the "destruction," the transformation arising from attention both renewed and redirected, that is evoked by Heidegger in the epigraph above. Actually, I have taken the Heidegger passage from Gunnell's *Political Philosophy and Time*, where it is the concluding quotation, evidently meant to summarize an important message of the book as a whole.³² Like virtually all of his articles, Gunnell's two books since carry through that first book's parting proposal for something on the order of a Heideggerian deconstruction of recent political inquiry. In *Political Theory* (subtitled *Tradition and Interpretation*), Gunnell deconstructs some metatheoretical projects of humanistic political theory. In *Philosophy, Science, and Political Inquiry*, he deconstructs the main metatheoretical program of scientific political theory.³³

Both deconstructions attempt to turn the resources of political inquiry against recent political inquiry in order to create a break in these two traditions of discourse. That is precisely the overall strategy of Heidegger in deconstructing the Western tradition. In the process, of course, Heidegger contributed mightily to constructing the Western tradition. In the same way, Gunnell's deconstruction inevitably makes both the scientific and the humanistic projects of political theory more coherent and interesting than before. Heidegger sought to dispel the Western miasma of metaphysics and epistemology in order to recover and revive the (original Western?) project of ontology: a substantive concern with human being (of which history is argued to be a construct). Relatedly, Gunnell's main purpose is to dispel the Modern (Western?) mesmerization with metatheory and epistemology in order to return both branches of political inquiry to the (original Western?) project of ontology: in particular, a substantive concern with human action (of which politics is argued to be a construct).

Many critics of scientific political theory seek to establish its impossibility in principle, arguing that it arises from a confusion of categories or the like. Most other critics find such theory to be fundamentally sound, saying that it needs only a few specific changes. The former critics would utterly destroy scientific political theory; the latter would merely reform it. But Gunnell is different. He faults scientific political theory in fundamental

ways yet calls for fundamental transformations that could save such theory from destroying itself. Scientific political theory has been turning itself into insubstantial and incorrect metatheory. Acting on this understanding, Gunnell directs the terms and judgments of metatheory against the cancerous takeover of theory by metatheory. Thus both Gunnell's aims and means for scientific inquiry into politics are exactly deconstructive.

The same can be said of Gunnell's aims and means for humanistic inquiry into politics. Its critics also are either totally dismissive or overly supportive. The former claim the impossibility of knowledge from humanistic inquiry, limiting its role to heuristics. The latter question its evidence and arguments all too little. Again, Gunnell is a radical critic with a mission of great transformation rather than utter elimination; alternately, he is a prophetic apologist with a message of urgent alarm rather than patriotic complacency. The internal dynamics of humanistic theories of politics have been evacuating them too into metatheory. Deconstructing these dynamics, Gunnell tries to turn other theorists onto its role in the self-destruction of humanistic inquiry into politics. He enjoins them to return their work to concrete concerns of politics and teaching.

In order to see the deconstructive figures of Gunnell's theory of political theory, it helps to trace the parallel forms of Martin Heidegger's attempt to deconstruct (what he regarded as) the Western tradition of philosophy. Heidegger argued that, undisturbed, the Western tradition would inherently descend into nihilism, destroying itself. The only way to save the best aspirations and qualities of the Western tradition is to deconstruct it: separating out and resituating what is worth saving, while destroying what troubles the tradition from within. As the epigraph indicates, Heidegger's destruction of the West was to be its saving transformation. The West must be destroyed (by Heidegger and company) to save it from its nihilistic self.³⁴

Implicitly, the logic of Gunnell's dual deconstruction of recent political inquiry is precisely the same. Untransformed, scientific and humanistic projects of political theory are destroying themselves. Inherently, they travel away from substantive theorizing about politics: scientific theory, because it cannot let go of methodology and epistemology; humanistic theory, because it cannot abandon a variety of metatheoretical distractions. Thus do the (now) irresistible attractions of metatheory usurp both the theory and the politics of political theory, destroying it from within. Gunnell's purpose is not merely to understand these defects or to demonstrate their inherency in both branches of political theory as currently projected, but to destroy them before they can destroy all of political inquiry. Since these defects are prime parts of present political inquiry, however, this means destroying it (as currently conceived, if not practiced).

Throughout the execution (as well as the conception) of this task, Gunnell's strategies and tactics are surprisingly Heideggerian. To Gunnell's credit, though, they are presented in a manner so accessible and unpretentious that their kinship with Heidegger's deconstruction easily goes unnoticed. Like Heidegger, Gunnell reaches down and back into the early, repressed histories of scientific and humanistic political theory. He identifies distortions, compulsions, and other costs resulting from the repression. Searching out the early commitments and capacities of both branches of political inquiry, he moves to free them from subsequent encumbrance, that other inquirers (rather than Gunnell himself) may develop them in different, more defensible directions.

At his best moments, Heidegger wanted to deschool the philosophy to come, not found a different school to dominate the others. This self-effacing, deconstructive purpose is even more striking on the part of Derrida. It stems from a sense that action is debilitated by unbridled requirements of academic analysis, while thought is suffocated by unproductive plasticities of extant traditions. Acts are reduced to texts. Uncritical canons supplant original reflections. Reading becomes mere seduction by others' words or ideas. Education is only indoctrination to established ideologies and institutions. In such circumstances, some experience a compulsive and convulsive need to clean the stables—or even to cast them and their old compartments aside. Thus does Gunnell seek to deschool the political inquiry to come. By dispelling current canons, he would free the field from dictatorial philosophies of science and purported theories of politics. By dissolving present approaches, he would free the field for fresh deeds, words, and ideas.³⁵

This is more a clearing than a creating operation, for (like Heidegger) Gunnell undertakes little construction of his own. Of course, this makes his project appear more purely or simply destructive than if he had a more compelling program to substitute for the old, discredited one. Even if left for completion by others, though, the project is still one of salvation. Rather than executing all of the steps himself, Gunnell concentrates on turning the rhetorical resources of his targets against themselves. In doing so, he sidles toward more flexible (theoretical, rhetorical, figural) categories than the rigid (analytical, logical, literal) concepts that he attempts to deconstruct.³⁶ Each device echoes at least one of the deconstructive techniques deployed by Heidegger.

Like Heidegger, Gunnell makes a modest effort to detect the ambitions of his opponents. But unlike Heidegger, Gunnell deals too briefly and casually with their full motivational complex. Also after the fashion of Heidegger, Gunnell attends too little to his target's real benefits and attainments, let alone how they are produced. But then, he never really

engages the levels of inquiry where most of the benefits can become evident. He talks almost exclusively of methodologies, seldom exploring the everyday research of either scientific or humanistic students of politics. Despite a (merely) professed intention to address the worlds of everyday life, Heidegger's alienation from the world thwarts his deconstructive ambition of a restored ontology. Due to a (merely) professional intention to address the actualities of theory and politics, Gunnell's alienation from political inquiry warps his deconstructive dream of a substantive theory of action. Spelling out some of this leads into the incompleteness and perplexities that bedevil his endeavor to date.

RETURN

The open society and the simultaneous contraction, depreciation, and loss of identity of the political or public realm go hand in hand, and thus the conditions of theorizing and the object of theorizing tend to disappear together. . . . This is not to suggest that the kind of impulse that gives rise to political theory has disappeared but only that the vehicle and object of this impulse must be sought elsewhere. It is not likely that the study of the history of political theory will lead to a revival of political theory, but at least it may reawaken a sense of the possibility, or at least the ideal, of a creative reordering or reconstitution of social life.

—John Gunnell³⁷

Gunnell's theory of political theory thus displays at almost every turn the structure and aspirations of Heidegger's salvation through destruction, as well as related principles of the deconstructivists. Still, to show that this project is present in Gunnell's work is not to show how self-consciously or skillfully he has been pursuing it. Given evidence that this project is prominent in his arguments and that it is sometimes stated in a decently direct and self-conscious manner, the issue of Gunnell's intentions as an author can be set aside for now. Instead, let us ask what can be done to improve his conjoint deconstruction of scientific and humanistic inquiries into politics. Does it contain turns left incomplete or targets still unattacked? For what reasons? At what prices?

At its preeminently deconstructive level, Gunnell's theory of political theory proceeds by devastating criticism of the main myths which dominate recent political inquiry. These include the myth of the given, the myth of theory, the myth of the tradition, and the myth of the political. Despite telling indictments of each, Gunnell returns repeatedly to parts of each in his own positions. There these myths cannot be improved because they are not recognized. Although Gunnell's first book treats even primitive myths as symbolic systems, his attempt to discredit each myth turns in the

end on showing it to be a systematic mistake, pure and simple. He abandons the deconstructive principle of sympathy that insists on seeking out the hidden validities and constructive uses of myths which nonetheless need thorough transformation. As a result, he is unable to put any of these myths completely behind him. For all his skill in criticizing these myths, Gunnell can neither avoid them himself nor point out a deconstructive detour around them for others. By deconstructive default, these myths must return eternally to wreak on Gunnell's work the revenge of the (poorly) repressed, troubling his deconstructive substitutions for past projects gone wrong.

This is how Gunnell's own project is incipiently self-destructive. In need of deconstructive transformation, it should drive us to consider Gunnell's myths in a more sympathetic and imaginative manner than Gunnell himself has managed thus far. Only then can Gunnell's project (or its progeny) attain adequate deconstruction of scientific and traditional inquiries into politics. Only then can we turn current inquiry around in a right direction. This section identifies four of Gunnell's myths and displays some of his troubles in deconstructing them. The next section points out ways in which each myth may be more adequately deconstructed and transformed, in the context of current theories of politics.

The Myth of the Given

Wilfrid Sellars has named this the myth of immaculate perception. It is a complex of commitments tied to the possibility and preferability of unmediated, undistorted apprehension of objects. It imagines the world as composed of atomic entities available for our direct, unchanging, and potentially certain knowledge. They are known referentially, as discrete and determinate units given to consciousness. This myth of objectivism permeates logical-positivist and logical-empiricist attempts to dichotomize theory (multiplicitous, interpretive, and instrumental) from fact (single, positive, and ontological).⁵

In arguing versions of conventionalism and contextualism, Gunnell succeeds in discrediting the myth of the given in others' positions. Time and again, however, it reappears in his own positions. Generally, it attends his forays into phenomenology and the theory of action, which is not very surprising in either case. The objectivist project of phenomenology is rather openly expressed in its presentation of the precritical consciousness of everyday life-worlds or practices: the fact-filled natural attitude which allows ontology to be bracketed in favor of a covertly naturalist kind of conventionalism. Similarly, Gunnell's action theory is inspired primarily by J.L. Austin and John R. Searle, both dedicated to vexed syntheses of naturalism

and conventionalism in studying human communication as a domain of action.³⁸ Phenomenology pursues a philosophical science of consciousness: Austin and Searle seek philosophical sciences of language, and Gunnell seems inclined toward an objectivist science of action.

Most recently, this surfaces in his distinction of an action's description (multiplicitous, interpretive, and instrumental?) from its designation (single, positive, and ontological!). Thus, in "Political Theory and the Theory of Action," Gunnell expressly designates his strategy as a movement from linguistic philosophy to a theory of conventional objects. Political objects are a subset of conventional objects. Gunnell denies that, properly speaking, there can be a theory of politics, because politics is conventionally constructed. (I return briefly to this point later.) For Gunnell, such a theory must avoid instrumentalism (where theories are mere tools for studying reality, not actual conceptions of it), provide for a conceptual constitution of social facts, and offer an ontology by giving a structure of actions.

Here Gunnell's description of a structure of actions follows Searle closely but with a few differences, such as Gunnell's greater commitment to the notion of nonlinguistic actions. Searle distinguishes locution, illocution, and perlocution; but Gunnell differentiates the physical, the conventional (combining the locutionary and the illocutionary), and the causal (illocutionary) aspects of actions. The conventional aspect involves intentionally hewing to grammatical, semantic, or social conventions embedded in public (social) circumstances. This conception of the structure of actions is said to be a scheme for individuating a particular action and its components.³⁹

According to this conception, Gunnell argues that political activity is a socially constituted and symbolically identified form,⁴⁰ for "isolating what action is performed."⁴¹ In turn, that is mostly a matter of intentional force, identified either through locating an action in a conventional context or applying criteria selected by an observer. We know what action is performed by appealing to the perceptions of the actor or those of an observer. If we ask what are Gunnell's criteria as an observer, we are led to his distinction between designation and description.

Gunnell aspires to an objective ontology of action. He thinks that is to be achieved at the level of designations. His "objectivity" requires a certain capacity for the individuation of actions that depends on each having a single, universally correct designation. Internal multiplicity and external problems of interpretation may (and will) arise for descriptions but not for designations. As Gunnell also stipulates, the performance of an action is described, but the action itself is only designated—in part by social actors. Thus, he insists that "certainly an action can have more than one description although not more than one correct designation. That is because designations

are how [social scientists] demonstrate conventional import."⁴² Yet, two troubles are evident here.

First, the multiple sources of designation seem to make it multiple, ambiguous, and incapable of the singularity ascribed to it by Gunnell. He admits that action theory is symbolic or interpretive analysis and that "symbolic analysis is a species of translation with all the limitations and difficulties that translation implies."⁴³ Presumably, he wants to restrict these limitations and difficulties to the domain of descriptions. But he appears to concede (as well he should) that political designations arise from the perspectives of actors and observers. The perspectives of observers especially (and of diverse actors also) are notorious sources of disagreement and multiplicity. How can their designations be singular, as Gunnell requires?

To put the point another way, action theory refers to a preconstituted universe of conventions when trying to demonstrate a particular designation. This set of conventions is our humanly constituted reality. It mandates that judgments arise from immanent criteria. Otherwise, it would be vulnerable to two moves rejected by Gunnell: instrumentalism and transcendentalism. But conventions and their interpretations in any society short of complete totalitarianism and utter one-dimensionality must be multiple. Therefore, why would we not have multiple designations? Indeed, why would we not have as many designations as descriptions?

This objectivism of designations is incompatible with Gunnell's own perspectivism of conventions. His conventionalism of actions as objects seems close to that of Henry in *The Real Thing* by Tom Stoppard:

There is, I suppose, a world of objects which have a certain form, like this coffee mug. I turn it, and it has no handle. I tilt it, and it has no cavity. But there is something real here which is always a mug with a handle. I suppose. But politics, justice, patriotism—they aren't even like coffee mugs. There's nothing real there separate from our perception of them. So if you try to change them as though there were something there to change, you'll get frustrated, and frustration will finally make you violent. If you know this and proceed with humility, you may perhaps alter people's perceptions so that they behave a little differently at that axis of behavior where we locate politics or justice; but if you don't know this, then you're acting on a mistake. Prejudice is the expression of this mistake.⁴⁴

From this angle, Gunnell's designations are mostly a temptation to treat political acts like coffee mugs, which Gunnell himself wants to avoid.

Gunnell's theory of action has a certain illocutionary force. His idea that description takes on many forms is meant to accommodate the obvious point that there are many ways to describe anything: morally, artistically, ideologically, scientifically, historically, and so on. Descriptions are multiple because "they take . . . forms according to the value questions that can

be posed within the theoretical context." By contrast, designations are singular because they fall into the domain of explanations, which are "scientific or empirical problems."⁴⁵ If not positivism precisely, this is surely some species of scientism. Because designations are ontological and ontology is conventional, they refer to "the symbolic universe" in the same ways that descriptions do. Tied to conventions of social action and analysis, designations must have the same multiplicity as descriptions. Indeed, there seems no good reason to distinguish the two.

Second, the multiple dimensions of intention seem to make designation multiple, conventional, and subject to ambiguity, for Gunnell approves Ludwig Wittgenstein's idea that all action is intentional. Thus Gunnell maintains that "there are no independent, objective points of support," that "meaning and necessity are preserved only in the linguistic practices which embody them," and that "even the rules do not provide a fixed point of reference because they always allow divergent interpretations." Since he insists that actions are individuated only in part by the intentions of social actors, he introduces disparity into the level of designation even before he gets to differences among observers and their perspectives. What other than a myth of the given could put this Humpty together again?

Gunnell concedes that designations can be incorrect. Does this allow a struggle for (rather than a conflict of) correct designations? He denies that there are basic (brute) actions. But does this deny that there are brute facts about actions? That is, does it deny that there are designations distinct from descriptions? Actions are individuated by conventions, but how do we know what they are? To Austin, conventions are phenomenologically brute facts. Unless Gunnell agrees, his designations become multiplicitous. Yet if he agrees, his attempted deconstruction of the myth of the given merely resurrects that myth. Gunnell attacks the behaviorist presumption that there are brute facts about performances, and his arguments appear to apply to actions as well. Yet he asserts that there are brute facts about actions, notwithstanding his refutation of Donald Davidson's doctrine of basic actions. Gunnell's deconstruction seems guided by an impulse toward Max Weber's brand of objectivism. But that is still a myth of the given, even if made more sophisticated by insistence that social reality is inter-subjectively constructed.

Gunnell's desire for an ontology of designations suggests a lingering naturalism of language and symbolic action. His conventionalism and his intentionalism of action appear to push toward an ontology of descriptions embedded in the ambiguity of practice. Then, designation and description would be intertwined or even indistinguishable. Gunnell's own argument that a theory of action is an ontology of practice encourages the conclusion that no singular designations exist, in science or elsewhere. It implies that

sharp distinctions between ontology and epistemology of action are impossible. Despite Gunnell's latent objectivism, this suggests that the epistemology of action is significantly (although sometimes secretly) political. Not only may any epistemology of action be politicized, but epistemology proper is importantly a political activity, which confounds Gunnell's strict separation among orders of inquiry.

Even though he seems successful in showing the myth of the given to be a systematic mistake, Gunnell still has not exorcised it from his theory. This is because he has failed to fathom the full attractions of the myth, so that they may be given their deconstructive due. In turn, that implies a mistake in reducing the myth to sheer error. Such a reduction depends on total literalization of the myth, refusing to respect its slippery symbolism as a set of epistemological tropes that make better sense of our world than of themselves.

To say what that sense might be would stretch far beyond the bounds of this essay. So I pose a possibility (rather than argue as a conclusion) that Gunnell goes wrong in approaching the myth of the given within its own philosophical mode alone. His literal rebuttal of its self-contradictory assumptions is fine as far as it goes. But beyond that, Gunnell needs a symbolical study of its meanings and uses, somewhat after the fashion of his mythical studies in *Political Philosophy and Time*. In other words, he should treat the myth of the given as an actual myth instead of a mere error. Gunnell does not exorcise the myth of the given because he sees it only as a systematic mistake.

The Myth of Theory

Actually, Gunnell identifies at least two myths of theory: one in science and one in politics. The structure of the two myths is much the same, but I address the latter under Gunnell's other label for it: the myth of the tradition. In science or in politics, the myth of theory is that academic inquiry alienated from the practice of which it is about can, nonetheless, constitute a theoretical dimension of the practice. Thus, epistemology and philosophy of science is mistaken for a theoretical dimension of science. Moreover, they are misconceived to provide rules for the conduct of science. For Gunnell, the fact is that such philosophical activities seem to know little about science, either natural or social. In any event, they are necessarily limited to retrospective comprehension of certain structural features of truly scientific activity. At least as far as metascience is concerned, Gunnell implies that metatheory is merely a mopping up operation, except when deployed against its own pretensions to rule the scientific roost.

In political inquiry, the myth of theory has been responsible for absurd obeisance and interminable struggles over the key to philosophy of science. Gunnell accuses both behavioralists and their foes of substituting such metatheory for truly substantive inquiries into politics. (This parallels his point that humanistic theorists of politics have mistaken their academic interests in politics for theories active within the domain of practical politics.) But the myth of theory is also faulted for encouraging an engineering mentality toward politics, especially on the part of academic analysts of public policy. The myth implies that a program can be worked out in advance, theoretically, and then applied to practice—as though putting it into practice were a separate (theoretical) problem from the initial issues about what program to choose. (This parallels Gunnell's point that scientific theorists of politics talk as though a program of science can be worked out in advance, theoretically, and then applied to actual investigation of politics.) Gunnell is against this conception of application, arguing that it alienates theory from practice. His complaint is comparable to Hilary Putnam's indictment of "scientism" as the mistaken view that rationality can consist in the application of advance criteria to subsequent cases.⁴⁶

Here again, Gunnell's attempt to treat a myth as a mere mistake gets him into trouble. On the one hand, he insists on the need for substantive theories of action. But on the other hand, he appears to deny the ability of any theory to address significant concerns of practice. Tacitly, Gunnell decides to enforce the very compartmentalization of practice, theory, and metatheory that he decries when criticizing the alienation of political theory. This results from his threefold or fourfold division into the languages and communities of actors, theorists, metatheorists, and epistemologists. (Sometimes Gunnell separates metatheory and epistemology; other times, he treats them together as third-order discourse.)

Elsewhere, I help to detail the troubles with these separations.⁴⁷ Rather than repeating that bit of deconstruction here, let me summarize it simply by saying that again Gunnell has not gone to the trouble of seeing the merits of the myth at issue. Some interdependence among these separable languages and some interaction among these increasingly distinct communities are needed by all of them. If the myth of theory is not apt or complete in its top-down mode of applying theory to practice, at least it explores their interaction to some extent. Thereby, it deplores their alienation to some effect—even though, in detail, that effect is objectionable. By contrast, Gunnell (all too much like me) is a living, writing embodiment of virtually every brand of alienation now applicable to political theory.

This line of argument connects with the previous discussion of action theory. If Gunnell were to succeed in simply avoiding the myth of theory, he would be unable to deploy action theory as either a descriptive or a

prescriptive theory of social phenomena. His conception of the (lack of) relationship between theory and practice would allow no purchase for either prospective application. But to his credit, Gunnell intends to engage politics both descriptively and prescriptively through his action theory. He tries to turn it into a (self-proscribed) metatheory capable of returning political science to substantive studies of politics. He even has some hope of succeeding, because his metatheory *can* be about actual practices, since it can (and in some respects, virtually must) be ontological.

The trouble here is not so much that Gunnell opens himself to the same objections that he lodges against others with metatheoretical missions but, rather, that he confuses us and himself about how philosophy (as metatheory or epistemology) can help or even join social science. He is right that philosophy cannot provide a basis for substantive inquiry by making claims about scientific explanation. But he misses that philosophy can provide a basis for substantive inquiry by making claims about social reality. This occurs because Gunnell sometimes conflates philosophy (which can be ontological) with analytical or other abstractionist philosophy (which has often, but not always, been empty of practical content). In turn, that transpires because he oscillates between trying to abandon metatheory and trying to get it right. He has not yet figured out how to be sufficiently self-conscious or self-consistent in his deconstruction to embrace such an ambiguity creatively. Again, all of these troubles trace to his mistaking the myth of theory for a mere mistake.

The Myth of the Tradition

Basically, the myth of the tradition is a humanistic version of the scientific myth of theory.

Beginning around the turn of the century, versions of the great tradition created the assumption that the conventional corpus of classic texts constituted the output of an actual historical activity or vocation which in turn represented the theoretical dimension of politics. Just as philosophy of science produced the myth of theory in science, historicism (in German idealism, Marx, Comte, and others) engendered the myth of theory in politics. This was the myth of world-historical actors and texts which, in some mysterious way, supposedly reflected and transformed the thought and action of their ages. They allegedly, for better or worse (usually better until after the Second World War), constituted a tradition that explained the present and was capable of being perpetuated, in some measure, by historians of political theory or even political scientists generally.⁴⁸

As might be expected, therefore, Gunnell's deconstruction of the myth of the tradition produces perplexities similar to those engendered by his treatment of the myth of theory.

From the sheer number of articles and chapters that Gunnell has devoted to criticizing the myth of the tradition, we might suppose it to be terribly perverse. And we might agree with Gunnell that it represents an impressive waste of effort and displacement of priorities. Hence, his criticisms have hardly been without need. This has the effect, however, of making Gunnell's own myth of the tradition all the harder to take. Sympathetic readers of his *Political Theory* typically come away from the final chapter both astonished and disappointed at the way Gunnell all but reinstitutes the myth of the tradition, after seeming to destroy it beyond revival in the previous pages of the book. Of course, Gunnell denies that the last chapter is a tradition myth. Instead, that chapter is said to portray political theory as an extrinsic or analytical genre, a reconstruction of texts mostly unrelated until the analyst (Gunnell) makes a case for teaching them in tandem. But his selection, relation, interpretation, and rationale of texts remains amazingly like the myth of tradition.

Evidently, we must ask after the key differences between an extrinsic genre or analytical reconstruction and a tradition myth. As best I can tell, they are two. First, the writing summarized by an analytical reconstruction does not constitute a theoretical dimension of whatever activities that the writing may be about, even when its reconstruction proceeds according to some commonality of subject matter. Second, the texts are not objectively interdependent in the sense that counts as a historical tradition: their authors were not self-consciously contributing to a discrete universe of discourse. To a considerable extent, these reasons can be deconstructed together, since both are based on objectivist assumptions about allegedly necessary properties of theories, practices, and traditions.

Parenthetically, let me admit that it is discouraging to discover this in a theory of political theory that tries so hard to overturn objectivism. But let me also insist that it is not surprising. Tendencies toward objectivism and essentialism, if not instrumentalism and transcendentalism, chronically trouble a would-be deconstructivist. Someone who turns on an objectivist tradition must struggle against the alternately reifying and relativizing properties of its language. The turner starts with little or no other language with which to deconstruct such a tradition, or there would be little or no reason to deconstruct it. This struggle is evident in Gunnell's troubled uses of "the open society," "the public realm," and "the political." They continually threaten to reinstate the political theories that he has taken pains to criticize on the part of others. But in the spirit of deconstruction, we should also recognize that such terms pay continual tribute to the real merit of those previous theories.

If we wonder why texts selected partly for their common topics are never a theoretical dimension of some activity, we will presumably be

directed to Gunnell's (partly valid) points about the myth of theory. But then we may remember the dilemmas and confusions occasioned by those points. These deconstructive complications are enough to justify treating the myth of the tradition as a once-live, if now-dying, myth—rather than a set of simply preposterous ideas.

If we look to the future, the question is why such a reconstruction as the myth of the tradition never could or should become a theoretical dimension of some practice. For reasons parallel to those for the scientific myth of theory, Gunnell's argument from impossibility remains unconvincing. Further, his only arguments from undesirability are parasitic on the impossibility argument, for they cite costs of attempting an impossibility. This should encourage us to continue to take the myth of the tradition seriously—albeit as a myth and one which Gunnell is correct to call into serious question.

If we look to the past, the question is why such a reconstruction is now inapt. At this level, Gunnell does little more than reassert his claim that the texts in question did not constitute a theoretical dimension of (political) practice. Even in ordinary times and ways, there is far more of a case for considering traditional classics as a theoretical dimension of politics than Gunnell recognizes. Even those who share some of his other criticisms of the tradition myth have made this case.

In doing so, they show also how debatable is Gunnell's second objection: that there has been no self-conscious universe of discourse constructed by and conducted through classic texts of political theory.⁴⁹ Moreover, as Gunnell emphasizes, the myth of the tradition has mainly predicated its case for practical relevance on the unusual status of political theory as heroic action in extraordinary times of trouble, of crisis.⁵⁰ When, in a passage immediately prior to this section's epigraph, Gunnell worries that his own (extrinsic) genre is too heroic to find a place in the open society, he plays on a theme central to the myth of the tradition as he defines it.⁵¹ But surely this concedes far too much to the myth of the tradition for it to be dismissed as a systematic mistake and nothing more. Again, we are invited to regard it as a full-fledged myth, which has presented the world in a special and at least somewhat valid (if not now entirely satisfactory) way.

As far back as *Political Philosophy and Time*, Gunnell advances a thesis of crisis, portraying political theorists as would-be founders of new orders. There and in his analytical tradition of *Political Theory*, he reads much like Sheldon Wolin on "epic theory" as political action. But he faults such projects as antipolitical. And as usual, there is merit to his criticism—even though it stands in tension with his own genre of political theory and (as argued below) with his treatment of the myth of the political.

Because they are antipolitical, such projects engage politics either perversely or not at all.

Gunnell has virtual lack of political involvement in mind when attacking the pretensions of so-called Crisis Theory to address actual politics in twentieth-century societies. He particularly decries its penchant for an academic jargon alien to public affairs and for an incipient transcendentalism of ideals. (A favorite example is the work of Jürgen Habermas.) This is consistent with his separate orders of theory alienated from politics.

Thinking of so-called experts on public policy, however, Gunnell warns of ambitions and advice which neither meet political needs nor understand political issues. Attempts to apply such political theory usually pervert political practice. Since the point of his complaint is that such political theory affects political practice perversely, his separation between (order of) theory and practice seems more prescriptive than descriptive. In other words, the perversity of application is not that theories fail to affect practice but that the theories applied are bad and their mode of affecting practice (through application) is even worse. Why would these not be effects of a theoretical dimension on its practice? And if they would not, how could anything important turn on the difference?

Another thesis of crisis is implicit in Gunnell's inspiration by the likes of Nietzsche, Heidegger, Foucault, and Derrida. Theirs is a less optimistic and active kind of crisis theory than that of heroic action through epic theory. Such crisis theory seldom seeks arenas of action beyond academia, regarding the more overtly political world as too corrupt or otherwise inattentive for now to be improved in any significant way. Hence theorists direct their efforts toward the politics of scholarship. There they tend to find the sorts of occlusions and corruptions of self-consciousness that call forth deconstruction. So they set about saving academic discourse, in order both to protect it from perversions of worldly politics and to keep alive visions of better politics than the world can now achieve.

As I argue elsewhere, their theorizing is intended to be a stand against times of terrible trouble; and it often slips into ironism.⁵² Then their reigning virtue is self-awareness, and they pointedly accept or even cultivate self-limitations similar to those uncritically characteristic of theorists in the grip of the myth of the tradition. Thus Gunnell writes of the plight of political theory in the open society, stressing his own awareness of alienation and artifice in order to distinguish his epistemology from other metascience and his extrinsic genre from traditional theory.

In this connection, the very notion of reconstruction implicitly contradicts Gunnell's objectivist standard for what could count as the Western tradition of political theory. This is the cartwheel of contradiction performed by Gunnell's second criticism. It begins in faulting the myth of the tradition

for a foolishly objectivist conception of histories and traditions: many purveyors of this myth write as though the Western tradition were simply there, given incontrovertibly by the facts of history. Gunnell is right to regard this as an exceptionally naive version of the myth of the given. But his criticism ends in an almost equally naive and positive assertion that the great tradition never existed, period. Since Gunnell is correct to insist that histories and traditions are reconstructions, a claim this simple and unqualified is implausible. In a good sense of the word, such reconstruction is the very mark of myth. Any history, any tradition is mythic.⁵³ By this deconstruction, the (objectivist) myth of the given and the (perspectivist) myth of the tradition can contradict one another.

Gunnell's account of the myth of the tradition is more undermotivated than wrong. In other words, it is preliminary to the main points, which lead in directions different from those that Gunnell appears to anticipate. If Dunning, Sabine, Strauss, Arendt, Wolin, and company were creating political theory as a distinct entity (tradition, vocation, universe of discourse), *why* were they doing so and to *what* effect?

Gunnell is good on the generational cleavage here. Sabine and his predecessors were after an ideational science of politics and an institutional practice of politics. But the later generations were out to protect politics from destructive science and to shield politics from corruptive practice. On both sides of the divide, but especially on the latter, the myth of the tradition was politically motivated and deployed. The later myths of the tradition did *express* an alienation from political practice. But most of what those myths have done to *produce* further alienations have been side effects of efforts to cope with the original alienation, which they blame on stupid science and corrupt politics. Arendt spoke for most of the later mythmakers when she insisted that her theorizing was political action because it gave coherence (meaning) to incoherent (corrupt) times. Gunnell partly agrees with the complaint against science but implicitly rejects the indictment of politics. And with this move, we come to the last myth.

The Myth of the Political

This myth is purveyed primarily by proponents of the myth of the tradition, although other theorists partake of it too. The myth of the political is an essentialist, naturalist, or transcendentalist worship of politics. It assumes that there are specific and uncontroversial criteria for what counts as politics, that there are necessary and sufficient conditions for the occurrence of politics, and that these can be known (if not put into practice). As a subspecies of the myth of the given, the myth of the political presupposes that not only politics but knowledge of it is unconstructed. By contrast, of course, Gunnell emphasizes the conventionality of politics,

even to the point of denying the possibility of a specifically political theory. (Any such thing must be an incomplete and incorrect part of what would properly be a theory of action or conventional objects.) Again Gunnell's criticisms are effective, but again they may end up claiming too much.

Elsewhere, Ira Strauber and I contribute to a more intricate deconstruction of the positions of Gunnell and the mythifiers of politics whom he attacks. Here let me make three brief points. First, Gunnell's conclusion to *Political Theory* (my epigraph to this section) implies that Gunnell once again engages in the very myth he deplores. What would it mean to write of a "loss of identity of the political or public realm" (note the definite article), without an essentialism of politics? If this kind of claim can be unessentialist, then many of the claims of traditionalists can be saved from essentialism.

Second, insofar as the meaning of this kind of assertion by Gunnell is uncertain, it is because Gunnell seldom writes directly about politics. On Gunnell's own grounds, issues about the character of politics can be addressed adequately only by speaking substantially about politics. Thus Gunnell's deconstruction of the myth of politics has not yet had a chance to get off the ground. Until Gunnell overcomes his own alienation from politics, he is restricted to making political points in a metatheoretical mode. To the extent that this can be done, Gunnell is wrong about relationships among practice, theory, and metatheory and, therefore, is unpersuasive about the myth of theory. To the extent that this cannot be done, Gunnell is unpersuasive about the myth of politics.

Third, because Gunnell is at least partly right about the flexibility and conventionality of what counts of politics and political theory, he cannot ignore the possibility that all four myths are rhetorical dynamics rather than category mistakes (as he tends to portray them). In some conditions, by some conventions, all four could be devices of substantive political action (let alone communication). Nor are these conditions and conventions a set of abstract possibilities with no political relevance to our times and institutions. At a minimum, Gunnell must admit that their proponents have attempted to defend these myths by precisely such claims about our rhetorical situations. And here, at least, that is to say our political situations. In turn, Gunnell must address these defenses. Then he would have to advance the concrete considerations of purpose and circumstance that he vaguely evokes as substantive political theory.

RENEW

Even devastation can be an art-form, can it not? Perhaps it is one of the greatest of all art-forms, since an art of destruction consumes its medium, it devours its own

epistemological foundations, and in this sublimely nullifying doubling-back upon its origins it far exceeds in moral compleity those forms which are merely productive. That is, I place a higher value on transformative art than on generative art.

—Robert Silverberg⁵⁴

Silverberg states well the tacit ambition of Gunnell, as disclosed in this essay. Gunnell has started to deconstruct political inquiry, and he has made a major contribution by beginning to tell us its myths. These are full, complicated myths rather than mere, factual mistakes or abstract, philosophical doctrines. As Gunnell and the rest of us come to comprehend these myths, we will know more about why and how to transform them in order to avoid the self-destruction of our political theory. In effect, other essays display, deconstruct, and transform these four myths into rhetorical, political, and mythical epistemologies.⁵⁵ I shall not repeat their arguments now; still, I ought to mention that they suggest how such epistemologies are more integral than alien to our political practices. Thus, they point to the importance of connecting epistemology to everyday inquiry and of reconciling theory and history to one another through myth. By way of these connections, we can realize the benefits of more adequate deconstruction of Gunnell's myths.

For Gunnell, the main issue about scientific inquiry into politics is its autonomy: its freedom from rule by abstract, *a priori* epistemologies or philosophies of science. Therefore, Gunnell does epistemology to deconstruct the claims and attractions of scientific metatheory. As we fight fire with fire to create a fire break, so Gunnell wields metatheory against metatheory to stop the spreading mesmerization of political science by methodology. This starts as decent deconstruction, but it stops short in simple destruction of metatheory (here, mostly epistemology). Gunnell's deconstruction cannot go farther, get more complicated, and thus give a more creative result, because it ignores the details of everyday research.

As Gunnell is right to insist, ordinary political science proceeds very differently from researchers' reconstructions of it. Those are laden with the ritual recitations of philosophical dogma deconstructed by Gunnell. These days, however, the very distance or alienation of the substance from the philosophy of inquiry means that Gunnell's exclusively philosophical arguments can have little effect on everyday research. Implicitly, this means to accept recent conceptions of social science and to trust future questions to their judgment unabatted by comparative consideration of a wide variety of research contexts. That Gunnell does not explicitly rule this out supports the possibility that he flirts with a naive (rather than a logical) positivism, since such uncomplicated objectivism easily dominates the everyday conduct

of social science. Still, this is at odds with the general ethos of Gunnell's comments on social science. Here we have another perplexity of his project.

Yet it is an opportunity, too, since we can go even farther than Gunnell has already gone toward renewing real cooperation between epistemology and everyday research.⁵⁶ Substantive inquiry into politics must be free from domination by abstract philosophy. But it must also be informed about other projects of inquiry in order to remain creative and self-critical. Current philosophies of inquiry often know too little about the actual conduct of research, especially in social science, to provide the inspiration and abet the critical comparison that substantive research now needs. Still, there remains immense room and use for philosophies which attend comparatively to the proceedings of real research projects. And although Gunnell's work does not yet meet this need, we owe to Gunnell's writings a good bit of our ability to recognize it.

A second repercussion of respecting and deconstructing Gunnell's four myths would be a reconciliation of history and theory with myth. (This would also be a reconciliation of history and theory with one another.) Such a reconciliation would support the spirit of Gunnell's principle of reconstruction, as well as his mythical techniques of deconstruction. And it could produce several highly desirable results. Most notably, it could help deconstruct objectivist conceptions of history and theory, for myth can be the flexible category capable of expressing how we question and constitute the past even as it creates and consternates us.

Not as clear falsehoods, but as cohering beliefs, the category of myth went largely undistinguished from that of history until the onset of the West. Nor were the two utterly separated and opposed until the rise of Modern science. Even now, however, we still see in myth the capacity for connection and significance that is craved in our age. Were myth not travestied as mere illusion and mistake, we would have little trouble seeing it in all sorts of history, including the historiography of the most objectivist academic historians. In this respect, to tie myth tightly to history is to insist on our constitution or patterning of the past in presenting it to ourselves.

There is also theoretical humility in such an assimilation of myth to history. This results from the ties of myth to categories of metaphor, image, mistake, misrepresentation, fantasy, and the like. These ties are a continual reminder that myth and history are ever correctable. They should always strive for objectivity in utter understanding of the other and the self, but they must never rest confident that this has been completely achieved. Like those of science, the objects of history are never fully fixed by us because they are objects to us. And of course, it is a commonplace that this justifies

the rewriting of history with each generation or cause that comes on the scene—that is, with each significant change in ourselves.

This also justifies arguing about history and the myths of historians (professional and otherwise). Given this rhetorical protection, we are able to seek the myths (that is, the histories) we need. Professional historians (and philosophers) often disparage and do everything possible to distance themselves from overtly mythic history, which they denounce as either mere popular history or sheer speculative (philosophy of) history. This does little credit to their own epistemological sophistication or needs. History and historiography are mythic, no matter how tacitly and unself-consciously so.

In our times, although not necessarily in others, objectivism in historiography accomplishes little more than poor myth: fragmentary, incoherent, unintelligent, and insignificant. This is a revenge of the repressed, for then it is easy to debunk the objectivist presentations of the past. Perhaps unfortunately, it is even easier to ignore objectivist historiography. And that is why academic historians now contribute so little to satisfying our hunger for history.

Yet you may ask: where does political theory come in? Isn't theory notoriously incompatible with history, always trying to force patterns onto recalcitrant facts or reduce historical objects to mere uses (such as testing future-oriented hypotheses)? How can the theoretical commitment to generality be reconciled with the historical commitment to particularity?

The required reconciliation is similar to that between myth and history. (Some deconstructivists would say that the reconciliation and relationship of theory to history is strictly the same as that of myth to history, since they regard "theory" and "myth" as roughly synonymous. But my point at the moment does not depend on any strict identification of the two.) We could say that history and theory need one another, especially in the study and practice of politics. History requires correction through the vision of theory; theory needs the narrative details and dynamics of history.

True as this may be, though, my point is not so much that theoretical generality and historical particularity must feed on each other. As often as not, that would push in the direction of each merely using the other (as in testing theories). Rather, my claim is that such broad and simple splits as theory versus history or generality versus particularity are too crude to do much more than cloud our vision. Like social science, philosophy of history can be regarded as a generalizing or theorizing aspect of historiography. Accordingly, the interdependence of these categories and projects can be seen to be much more intimate and complicated than obvious relationships of use. The same goes for the perspective encouraged by

seeing historiography as a particularizing side of philosophy or theory of history.

From these considerations, it follows that projects of myth need much greater and more explicit emphasis than academia has accorded them. Myth is at once concrete and specific like history, yet abstract and general like theory. Myth is our reservoir of archetypal narratives and characters for describing, explaining, and learning from history. The result, in terms of histories of politics and political theorizing, should be more self-conscious reflection and work on philosophy of history.

The challenge is to avoid rationalism in this enterprise. Hegel looms so large over philosophy of history that his example requires some kind of emulation but requires also the stoutest resistance to ending up with History and (or as) Reason. Again the humility of myth can come to the rescue, perhaps aided by scientific devices of community criticism, for myth retains the implicit limits and capacities of self-criticism earlier cited of aphorisms and principles. Elsewhere, I have suggested some specific ways to develop this capacity,⁵⁷ but here it is more important to identify priority projects than to set out personal versions of them in any detail.

The need of political theory for mythic projects is manifest, not only in this profound sense of historical vision, but also in the more familiar (and plainly political) senses of motive force and active aim. As a matrix of principles to motivate action, theory has already passed over into myth. Without this mythic moment, theory must lack the inspirational and directional turns needed for taking it (and us) from contemplation into action. Were we able and motivated to make some strictly scientific theory of politics, completely apart from myth, that theory would be unable to move us into particular political commitments and practices. It would lack this prime component of rhetorical force. Insofar as current theories push us into politics, they are also myths. (Remember, though, that indefinitely many modes of pushing and politics, not to mention myth, remain possible here.) Insofar as they do not, they are poor political theories. (This judgment, too, is subject to the same caution.)

As a set of maxims to shape such impulses into particular forms and effects of action, Gunnell is right to suggest that such scientific theory inclines toward modes of application and engineering. These are the ties between thought and action celebrated by theoretical instrumentalists, who have seldom appreciated other avenues from theory to practice. Of course, even they are guided by (mostly unself-conscious and sometimes unsatisfactory) myths of application. Better attention to these myths and their alternatives might in itself mean better political theory these days.

Still, the main value of making theory more thoroughly and self-consciously mythic in this second sense is that it highlights other routes

from theory to practice. Political theory is meant to contribute more and differently to political practices than can be construed through the modes of imagination, inspiration, and application—prolific and mythic though they may be. At a minimum, it contributes also through initiation, interpretation, instruction, definition, evaluation, justification, legitimation, reconstruction, deconstruction, and edification. To discerning eyes, the machinations of myth are evident in almost every opening of these doors between theory and practice.

Partly, this explains why recent political science, which caricatures myth as mere category mistake or ridicules it as sheer falsehood, must still attempt simplistic oppositions of fact to value or fact to fiction in order to “save” theory from myth. Without such dichotomies, could (mythical) science pretend to resist the (straightforwardly political) seductions of mythical society? And could society hope to stop the (tacitly political) imperialisms of science? These concerns indicate how recent reservations about politics slide indistinguishably into our animus against myth.

This kind of connection is evident as well in the inability of instrumentalism to appreciate how theories help to constitute (if not create) reality. Anti-instrumentalists show that theories are (conceptions of) reality, not mere tools for finding facts which separately express (conceptions of) reality. Long comfortable with making claims of ontology, myth might be able to endow theory with what critics of instrumentalism seem to want: a more self-confident and self-critical capacity for conceiving reality. Because it accepts politics better, more mythic political theory may engage political practice in a richer variety of ways than antimythic theory can manage.

Gunnell is most mythic and deconstructive when he urges that the political theorist be perceived positively as an illusionist. He favors dramaturgical dimensions of theory because they recognize that “the political world is an illusion.” In turn, the theorist is “a destroyer of illusion, the subversive who seeks to undercut the form and substance of the symbolic crystal of society.”⁵⁸ Still, the theorist’s destruction serves a reconstruction of society.

The theorist is the creator of a new illusion which he believes expresses knowledge the old did not. Political society cannot bear the truth of order in undiluted form, but it can act out an illusion that expresses the truth of order. The theorist knows well the difficulties of maintaining the illusions of political society, but he also knows that it is even more difficult to maintain political society without illusion. If, as Aristotle argued, political science is the master science, the political theorist is the master illusionist.⁵⁹

Thus is Gunnell’s political theory a self-consciously deconstructive and mythic enterprise.

From a perspective of deconstruction, the great advantage of increased mythical consciousness is an improved ability to criticize constructively and creatively. Conversely, deconstruction can contribute to mythical consciousness a greater capacity for self-criticism. Both opportunities are well within the shadow-structure of Gunnell's theory of political theory. Now let us transform them into the substance of our political inquiry.

Notes

1. For supporting the time to write this essay, I thank the University of Iowa for its Faculty Fellowship. For supporting the time to research this essay, I thank the University House of the University of Iowa for its Carnegie-Mellon Fellowship. The essay's interpretation of the work of John Gunnell has been greatly abetted by cordial correspondence with Gunnell, to whom I am grateful. But the essay's biggest debt by far is to Ira Strauber. Some of its main themes have been discussed so much with him that I no longer know which of us has contributed what to their origination and articulation. Still, I am confident that Strauber will continue to tell me how much he dissents from what the essay argues. And for that, too, I thank him.
2. *PT*, 160.
3. *Matthew* 16:25.
4. See: Glenn Tinder, *The Crisis of Political Imagination*, New York, Scribner's, 1964; Richard L. Rubinstein, *The Cunning of History*, New York, Harper and Row, 1975; Lawrence L. Langer, *The Age of Atrocity*, Boston, Beacon Press, 1978; Robert L. Heilbroner, *An Inquiry into the Human Prospect*, New York, Norton, enlarged edition, 1975; Gordon Rattray Taylor, *The Doomsday Book*, New York, Harcourt, Brace and World, 1970; Susan Sontag, "The Imagination of Disaster," in Mark Rose, ed., *Science Fiction*, Englewood Cliffs, NJ, Prentice-Hall, 1976, 116-131; Ron Rosenbaum, "The Subterranean World of the Bomb," *Harper's*, 256, 1534, March, 1978, 85-105; Victor Ferkiss, "Pessimism About the Future: New Departure or Return to Normal?" *Alternative Futures*, 3, 2, Spring, 1980, 111-125.
5. See: Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things*, New York, Random House, 1970; Foucault, *The Archeology of Knowledge, and The Discourse on Language*, A. M. Sheridan Smith, trans., New York, Random House, (1969, 1971), 1972; Foucault, *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice*, Donald F. Bouchard, ed., Bouchard and Sherry Simon, trans., Ithaca, NY, Cornell University Press, 1977; Hayden White, "Foucault Decoded: Notes from Underground," *History and Theory*, 12, 1, 1973, 23-54; Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, trans., Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, (1967), 1974; Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, Alan Blass, trans., Chicago, University of Chicago Press, (1967), 1978; Derrida, *Spurs*, Barbara Harlow, trans., Chicago, University of Chicago Press, (1978), 1979; Harold Bloom, et. al., *Deconstruction*, Ithaca, NY, Cornell University Press, 1976; Bloom, *The*

Anxiety of Influence, New York, Oxford University Press, 1973; Harold Bloom, *Kabbalah and Criticism*, New York, Seabury Press, 1975; Harold Bloom, *A Map of Misreading*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1975; Geoffrey H. Hartman, *The Fate of Reading, and Other Essays*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1975; Hartman, *Criticism in the Wilderness*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1980; Paul de Man, *Allegories of Reading*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1979.

6. There is much to be said for regarding Søren Kierkegaard and especially Friedrich Nietzsche as the first disciples of deconstruction. My education about deconstruction has been greatly enhanced by the critical account in: Allan Megill, *Prophets of Extremity*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1985.

7. On analysis as destruction, see: Owen Barfield, *Poetic Diction*, Middletown, CT, Wesleyan University Press, 1928; Barfield, *Saving the Appearances*, New York, Harcourt, Brace and World, n.d.; C. S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man*, New York, Macmillan, 1947.

8. Compare the conception of "prefiguration" in: Hayden White, *Metahistory*, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973; White, *Tropics of Discourse*, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978.

9. Compare: Paul Ricoeur, "The Model of the Text: Meaningful Action Considered as a Text," *Social Research*, 38, 3, Autumn, 1971, 529-562; Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory*, Fort Worth, Texas Christian University Press, 1976; Charles Taylor, "Interpretation and the Sciences of Man," *Review of Metaphysics*, 25, 1, September, 1971, 3-51; Gunther Buck, "Hermeneutics of Texts and Hermeneutics of Action," *New Literary History*, 12, 1, Autumn, 1980, 87-96.

10. See: John S. Nelson, "Tropical History and the Social Sciences," *History and Theory*, 19, 4, 1980, 80-101; Nelson, "Meaning and Measurement across Paradigms: Metaphor and Irony in Political Inquiry," paper for the Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, 1977.

11. Compare: Geoffrey H. Hartman, "Crossing Over: Literary Commentary as Literature," *Comparative Literature*, 28, 3, Summer, 1976, 257-276.

12. See: Hayden White, "Review Essay [on Vico by Leon Pompa]," *History and Theory*, 15, 2, 1976, 186-202.

13. See: Gerald Graff, "Fear and Trembling at Yale," *American Scholar*, 46, 4, Autumn, 1977, 467-478; Graff, *Literature Against Itself*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1979; Graff, "Politics, Language, Deconstruction, Lies, and the Reflexive Fallacy: A Rejoinder to W.J.T. Mitchell," *Salmagundi*, 47-48, Winter-Spring, 1980, 78-94; Jonathan Culler, "Beyond Interpretation: The Prospects of Contemporary Criticism," *Comparative Literature*, 28, 3, Summer, 1976, 244-256; Denis Donoghue, *Ferocious Alphabets*, Boston, Little, Brown, 1981.

14. Compare: Steven Knapp and Walter Benn Michaels, "Against Theory," *Critical Inquiry*, 8, 4, Summer, 1982, 723-742; Paul F. Kress, "Against Epistemology: Apostate Musings," *Journal of Politics*, 41, 2, May, 1979, 526-542.

15. Compare: Edward Said, *Beginnings*, New York, Basic Books, 1975.
16. Compare: de Man, *Allegories of Reading*, 114ff.
17. Compare: Steven Marcus, "Language into Structure: Pickwick Revisited," *Daedalus*, 101, 1, Winter, 1972, 183-202; John S. Nelson, "Toltechs, Aztechs, and the Art of the Possible: Parenthetical Comments on the Political Through Language and Aesthetics," *Polity*, 8, 1, Fall, 1975, 80-116.
18. For arguments which imply the inevitability and desirability of metamoves and epistemics, compare: Annie Dillard, "Is Art All There Is?," *Harper's*, 261, 1563, August, 1980, 61-66; Jane Flax, "Why Epistemology Matters: A Reply to Kress," *Journal of Politics*, 43, 4, November, 1981, 1006-1024. Also note my explanation of the inevitability and desirability of deconstruction, later in this essay.
19. De Man, *Allegories of Reading*, 112.
20. See: White *Metahistory*; Nelson, "Tropical History and the Social Sciences;" Nelson, "Meaning and Measurement across Paradigms."
21. De Man, *Allegories of Reading*, 125.
22. See: Hannah Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, New York, Viking Press, enlarged edition, 1968, especially 17-40; John S. Nelson, "Politics and Truth: Arendt's Problematic," *American Journal of Political Science*, 22, 2, May, 1978, 270-301, on 294ff. Turns or deconstructions have no choice but to rely on terms from their target texts or traditions. De Man shows as much in exploring Nietzsche's deconstruction of literality and its attendant notion of reference. "This complication is characteristic for all deconstructive discourse: the deconstruction states the fallacy of reference in a necessarily referential mode." (*Allegories of Reading*, 125.)
23. De Man, *Allegories of Reading*, 125.
24. Samuel Delany, *The Einstein Intersection*, New York, Ace Books, 1967, 18. Notably, Delany is himself something of a deconstructivist, both as a critic and as a writer of (highly mythical) science fiction.
25. On dialectic, see: Karel Kosik, *Dialectic of the Concrete*, Karel Kovanda and James Schmidt, trans., Boston, D. Reidel, 1976; Nicholas Rescher, *Dialectics*, Albany, State University of New York Press, 1977; Paul Piccone, "Dialectical Logic Today," *Telos*, 1, 2, Fall, 1968, 38-83; Michael Kosok, "The Dynamics of Paradox," *Telos*, 5, Spring, 1970, 31-43; Kosok, "The Dialectical Matrix," *Telos*, 5, Spring, 1970, 115-159; David Bloor, "The Dialectics of Metaphor," *Inquiry*, 14, 4, Winter, 1971, 430-444; Isaac D. Balbus, "The Negation of the Negation," *Politics and Society*, 3, 1, Fall, 1972, 49-63; Herbert Marcuse, "On the problem of the Dialectic," *Telos*, 27, Spring, 1976, 12-39; Francis Baumli, "Hegel's Primary Approach to the Dialectical Methodology—A Reappraisal," *Philosophical Forum*, 7, 3-4, Spring-Summer, 1976, 225-236.
26. See: John S. Nelson "Political Theory as Political Rhetoric," in Nelson, ed., *What Should Political Theory Be Now?*, Albany, State University of New York Press, 1983, 169-240, on 184.

27. Stanley Cavell, *The Claim of Reason*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1979, 5.
28. Compare: Edward Shils, *Tradition*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1981.
29. *What Is Philosophy*, William Kluback and Jean T. Wilde, trans., New York, Twayne, 1958, 71-73.
30. Compare: William E. Connolly, "The Dilemma of Legitimacy," in Nelson, ed., *What Should Political Theory Be Now?*, 307-336, on 326-336.
31. Cavell, *The Claim of Reason*, xix.
32. PPhT, 258.

33. Gunnell's main themes and arguments appear repeatedly throughout his writings. Each permutation adds something significant to the details of his deconstructions. But here my concern is with the broad pattern of his writings. Hence the sheer number of passages pertinent to any particular point that I make must preclude exhaustive citations in support of it. And although Gunnell's positions are very slippery about specifics, their basic clarity is so great that I doubt any need to offer even illustrative citations for most of the theses, strategies, and tactics attributed to Gunnell in this and the next section of the essay.

I am reasonably sure that readers of Gunnell will readily recognize the accuracy of my characterizations of his work, without the help (or distraction) of expansive examples or numerous citations. The other essays in this volume can be taken as extensions of my argument in this respect. Here my deconstructive contribution is not to explicate the major parts of Gunnell's work but to represent them differently from before. I suspect that the absence of lengthy quotations and citations from Gunnell's writings will not be missed by nonreaders of Gunnell, either. Yet for the reasons advanced in this chapter, I obviously hope that it and the volume as a whole will move the latter group to become readers of Gunnell.

In addition to the books and articles by Gunnell that are cited by other contributors to this volume, let me mention several of his yet unpublished papers which I believe to fit my deconstructive mold: "Reason and Commitment: Political Values and the Problem of Justification," paper for the Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, 1969; "Political Theory as an Avocation," paper for the Annual Meeting of the Midwest Political Science Association, 1978; "Knowledge and Politics," Distinguished Research Address, Rockefeller College, State University of New York, Albany, 1983.

34. My sense of Heidegger's projects derives somewhat from Hans-Georg Gadamer: *Truth and Method*, Garret Barden and John Cumming, eds., New York, Seabury Press, (1960, 1965), trans. from the second edition, 1975. *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, David E. Linge, ed. and trans., Berkeley, University of California Press, 1976; "Theory, Technology, Practice: The Task of the Science of Man," *Social Research*, 44, 3, Autumn, 1977, 529-561. Many aspects of Gadamer's work are worth comparing to Gunnell's. That is especially true of their notions of historicity, as is argued by several other contributors to the volume at hand—notably Russell Hanson. Un-

fortunately, there is no more room here for a detailed treatment of Gadamer than there is for intricate discussion of the positions of de Man or Derrida.

35. In this volume, compare Strauber's argument about how Gunnell seeks to unsettle settled expectations.

36. See Gunnell's discussion of the ideas of C.A.O. Van Nieuwenhuijze in *DSCT*, 67ff.

37. *PT*, 161.

38. See: J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, J.O. Urmson, ed., New York, Oxford University Press, 1962; John R. Searle, *Speech Acts*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 1969.

39. Originally, this treatment of Gunnell's distinction between designation and description was worked out in discussion with Ira Strauber. Since then, I have inserted several twists with which he might not agree.

40. *PTTA*, 348. This reiterates an earlier argument in *PICA*.

41. *PTTA*, 349.

42. *PTTA*, 351.

43. *PTTA*, 357.

44. Tom Stoppard, "Politics and Words [from *The Real Thing*]," *Harper's*, 268, 1606, March, 1984, 24.

45. *PTTA*, 354.

46. Hilary Putnam, *Reason, Truth and History*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1981, 49–50.

47. See: Ira L. Strauber and John S. Nelson, "For Epistemology," unpublished paper.

48. *ISPO*, 30.

49. Compare: Richard Ashcraft, "One Step Backward, Two Steps Forward: Reflections upon Contemporary Political Theory," in Nelson, ed., *What Should Political Theory Be Now?*, 515–548, on 531–532; Nelson, "Political Theory as Political Rhetoric," 177–180.

50. Compare: *ibid.*, 180–182; Nelson, "Stands in Politics," *Journal of Politics*, 46, 1, February, 1984, 106–131.

51. See: *PT*, 160–161; also see, 136–159.

52. John S. Nelson, *Ironic Politics*, Ph.D. dissertation, Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Department of Political Science, 1977, iv–xxiv, 1–62, 753–871; Nelson, "Stands in Politics."

53. See: John S. Nelson, "Postmodern Myths of Politics, with Special Reference to Science Fiction," paper for the Annual Meeting of the Midwest Political Science Association, 1982.

54. Robert Silverberg, "The Wind and the Rain," *The Future Now*, Robert Hoskins, ed., Greenwich, CT, Fawcett, 1977, 210-219, on 212.
55. See: Nelson, "Political Theory as Political Rhetoric," 193-204; Nelson, "Post-modern Myths of Politics," 5-16.
56. Compare: John S. Nelson, "Education for Politics: Rethinking Research on Political Socialization," in Nelson, ed., *What Should Political Theory Be Now?*, 413-478, on 473-478.
57. See: Nelson, *Ironic Politics*, 63-317.
58. *PT*, 156.
59. *PT*, 156.

CHAPTER XIII

Annals of Political Theory: Replies and Reflections

JOHN G. GUNNELL

In this chapter, I attempt to make both historical and conceptual connections among the various issues, in and about political theory, that have been raised in this volume. For two reasons, I begin by offering a brief and more personalized or autobiographical rendition of these relationships. First, the preceding essays are prompted, in a few cases, by my criticism of their authors' work, as well as of the broad field of political theory. Second, my criticism of the contemporary condition of academic political theory is not fully intelligible outside the intellectual context in which it was generated.

Much of my work consists of critical reflection and commentary on various dimensions of the literature of political theory. The contributors to this volume have devoted themselves to a careful analysis of that work; but they have also clarified, elaborated, and even initiated their own arguments. Needless to say, the essays stand on their own. My response is an attempt to sustain the dialogue and to avoid eristics and polemics. My purpose is less to defend some position than to use this opportunity to develop, elucidate, and amend past claims—and to offer promissory notes regarding future arguments. Nevertheless, I should distinguish at least three different types or levels of response.

First, although I do not want to fall into the mold of suggesting that criticisms are the product of a failure to grasp my original claims, some clarifications are required. In some instances, I probably did not say what I meant and did not mean what I said. In other instances, the contributors

attribute to me claims, assumptions, intentions, and purposes that do not reflect my actual views. Second, several definite disagreements warrant joining issues directly and argumentatively. These instances are, however, relatively rare once clarification has been achieved. Third, a few questions raised herein I had neither verbally nor intellectually crystallized, but I am eager to engage them now. In one way or another, most of the issues involve (1) the relationship between (academic) political theory and politics and (2) the relationship between (academic) philosophy and political inquiry. My general claims about these matters, including the historical development of the field of political theory, are to some degree presupposed in what follows. Since the essays in this volume were written, I have published a comprehensive critical analysis of the field of political theory which both synthesizes and extends my arguments. It also takes account of the criticisms in these essays, and it should be construed as a fuller response than the following comments.

I

During the early 1960s, political scientists and political philosophers were deeply involved in a debate about the nature and status of political theory and what constituted its proper practice. Like most graduate students in the political science of that era, and particularly those in the subfield of political theory, I was caught up in this controversy. It was often (but in retrospect, not very edifyingly) characterized by participants on both sides as a dispute between "traditional" and "scientific" theory. This was essentially a confrontation between those committed to the history of political thought as the principal focus of theory in political science and those (self-identified behavioralists) dedicated to appropriating the methodology of the natural sciences as the core model of theory in a social-scientific discipline. The issues were usually far more complex than either side realized at the time, and the battle lines were not drawn in a sophisticated manner.

Since the subfield of political theory in political science was largely dominated by historians or traditionalists, students such as myself who were majoring in theory usually found themselves situated in the antibehavioral camp, especially at institutions such as Berkeley. Almost without choice and certainly without much reflection, we were absorbed in trying to illuminate some aspect of what we understood as the great tradition of Western political thought. At that point, a field of political theory or philosophy that extended beyond political science was only vaguely defined, and the issues were rather narrow. Often the purpose of studies in political

theory was to demonstrate the deficiencies of modern political ideas and institutions—particularly the intellectual tendencies manifest in contemporary social science in general as well as in the behavioral movement in political science.

All parties agreed that to talk about political theory was, at least in the first instance, to talk about the tradition of political thought from Plato to the present. Would the path forward develop or transform theory to make it part of a scientific study of politics? Or should the aim be to study the past and, in some manner, reappropriate knowledge relevant to the present? That was the choice of the day. Pressed for elaboration, those who believed in the possibility and merits of a scientific approach might reveal less than a clear consensus on ends and means. But, however abstractly, they embraced a relatively uniform credo, and their image of solidarity was reinforced in representative articulations.

Their claims about science and scientific method probably were, at that time, more apologies and justifications for particular research programs than guides to inquiry. Still, they provided an identity for behavioralism. Although their view of opponents (as historians, moralists, metaphysicians, etc.) was largely one-dimensional, the degree of unanimity in the traditionalist wing was easy to exaggerate. The exact meaning and constitution of the tradition as a whole, how to approach and interpret its canon of classics, and its significance for addressing the contemporary world were all moot issues—maybe, I think now, in both senses of that term. Different “political” purposes were embodied in this political-historical commentary. These academic and ideological differences often extended into the life of political science departments, in ways similar to the tensions between behavioralism and its opponents.

Like most students of political theory, I was initiated into a paradigm exemplified in the work of George Sabine, Leo Strauss, Hannah Arendt, and (after 1960) Sheldon Wolin. These individuals were hardly of one mind on all issues. Some messages were, however, quite uniform. Like most of my contemporaries, I tended to be self-consciously (although somewhat shallowly) antibehavioral. My teachers in political theory were all in some way involved in criticism of the behavioral program, and I therefore adopted the conventional posture and opted for what I believed was humanism over scientism. But although provided with—and possessing—few independent critical resources, I increasingly became less than totally sanguine both about the study of the history of political theory and about the basis of its critique of science.

This nascent critical distance developed in part as the result of an attempt to step outside some of the tensions between individuals with whom I studied. Aside from such personal considerations, however, some

of the explicit debates and implicit disagreements within the historians' camp (such as that involving the Straussian school) often seemed both inexplicable and exaggerated. At the same time, the standard criticisms of behavioralism sometimes seemed less than profound. Although the critics complained about the effects of science and the implied aim of turning human beings into objects for purposes of social control, most largely accepted the same basic account of science that they were attacking.

Several years elapsed before I explored these notions of science in a much more detailed manner, but by the time that I began to formulate a dissertation, I was already in many respects less concerned with the substance of the history of political thought than with the need to make sense of the characteristic forms of discourse in the field and so sort out the varieties of historical commentary. During my graduate career, the Straussian contingent of the department fell by the wayside. The remaining viewpoints were in many ways diffuse, but something to which I would now refer as the Berkeley thesis became increasingly apparent. Although my contemporaries turned to a variety of research topics, there was an important sense in which many wrote dissertations exemplifying that thesis. Even though I did not favor some of the substantive interpretations and political messages in Eric Voegelin's work, it did contain a theory of symbolism from which I initially attempted to develop an independent perspective.

Overall, the experience of those years pushed my concerns toward metatheory. Although some time passed before I raised, publicly, direct questions about such basic matters as the reality of the great tradition,² I did begin to ask, for example, why so much political theory took a historical form. Why did theorists who mainly seemed to want to say something about contemporary politics feel constrained to articulate and legitimate their arguments through historical interpretation, through a kind of nineteenth-century redaction of all previous thought? And why, despite differences in political perspective, were there so many structural and substantive similarities in this exegetical literature?

My concern with these matters surfaced in my dissertation prospectus, which attempted to situate these historical commentaries in particular aspects of modern philosophy, especially Heidegger's notion of deconstructing the Western tradition. My concrete research, however, eventually led to tracing connections between history and theory back to the "origins" of Western political thought and to the general problematic of "time" in political philosophy. In the end, I wrote a book focused on Plato³ that, I believed, broke substantially with the dominant literature in the field. Not until the mid-1970s did I return systematically to metatheoretical questions of political theory and historical interpretation. The status of the history of political theory in political science was, by that time, less a matter of great controversy,

and critical reflection on historical inquiry and political theory was taking new directions. My concerns in the meantime were with the image of science in political inquiry.

In the mid-1960s, shortly after I left graduate school, I undertook a study of culturally diverse perspectives on time and its relationship to political perceptions that, in turn, led to a consideration of the concepts of time and history in social-scientific explanation.⁴ During the course of this investigation, I was forced to confront directly the claims about the character and demands of scientific explanation advanced by behavioralists and other social scientists moved by positivism. I concluded that to explain politics and political activity required an understanding of temporal perceptions and attitudes, as well as other conceptual structures that constitute the actor's image of the world and the context of social action. I concluded that the behavioral account of social science was deficient. Its emphasis on quantification, nomological generalization, abstract and *a priori* conceptual frameworks such as systems analysis and structural functionalism, and other putative requirements of scientific investigation distorted the demands of explanation.

At this point, I came upon the work of N.R. Hanson and, shortly after, Thomas Kuhn. Kuhn's work had been cited in political science only as strange support for the behavioral history of political science, but it seemed to me that it implicitly posed questions about the validity of the behavioral image of science. As I pursued that line of inquiry, I was also influenced by a number of recent works in the philosophy of social science. While Kuhn and others questioned the positivist and logical-empiricist reconstructions of scientific theory and explanation that had informed behavioralism, such philosophers as Peter Winch, A.R. Louch, Stuart Hampshire, and Charles Taylor suggested an alternate notion of explanation in social science based on post-Wittgensteinian philosophies of language and mind. I also discovered similar arguments about social science that came from the phenomenological tradition and the work of individuals such as Alfred Schutz, and I began to explore Max Weber's essays on methodology and the theory of social action—along with work of philosophers such as Wilhelm Dilthey. Although various "lessons" could be—and by the early 1970s, had been—derived from these literatures, no one in political science had published a critique of the field from this perspective.

I submitted an article to *The American Political Science Review* that, I think it is fair to say, was violently rejected. The article was published elsewhere in 1968.⁵ I argued that the notions of scientific method and explanation that were fast becoming part of the behavioral orthodoxy, in both theory and practice, were incorrect—even as a picture of natural science, let alone as a model for understanding and pursuing inquiry in

social science. These notions were the product of an obsolescent philosophy of science, which presented an inaccurate picture of the logic and epistemology of natural science and propagated a myth of the unity of scientific method. I concluded that social science should be autonomous and that its autonomy should be based on the particular kind of phenomena to which it attends, namely, social action. This argument departed from most opposition to the behaviorist program in political science, which still tended to accept the positivist definition of science and to claim that the scientific attitude was partly or wholly inappropriate for the concerns of political inquiry.

By this time, I was convinced, however, that there was a problem about the whole relationship between philosophy and social science. Simply to cast off the positivist model of science and the attendant philosophy of social science and to adopt postpositivist alternatives was not sufficient. Yet, this was the syndrome that quite rapidly took shape as the new philosophical perspectives became accessible. I stressed this general problem when I undertook a more detailed criticism of the deductive-nomological model of explanation and its impact on political science. Somewhat reluctantly published by *The American Political Science Review*, that piece was accompanied by two editorially solicited and unrefereed rebuttals. In the same year, I published a parallel piece on the influence of the instrumentalist notion of scientific theory promoted by positivism and on the manner in which it contributed to the poverty of theory in political science.⁶

Postpositivist arguments in the philosophies of science and social science provided a basis for criticizing positivist assumptions in social science; but in themselves, they constituted neither methods nor theories. Distinctions between theory and metatheory, between warrants for substantive knowledge and epistemology, and between practices and philosophies of social science were not adequately vivid. Substantive claims about the nature of social and political phenomena were required; and for me, that entailed continued attention to the theory of action and a de-emphasis of the parasitic and metatheoretical issues about the explanation of action.⁷

Nevertheless, metatheoretical critique could not be abandoned. Positivism and logical empiricism had made a large imprint on the theory and practice of political science, and this required a comprehensive and detailed metatheoretical criticism of the discipline.⁸ Political scientists had constructed a self-image and scientific identity from a philosophy severed from close acquaintance with the practice of natural science or social science. Yet this philosophy, of which they often had only secondary or tertiary knowledge, had increasingly become not only a part of the ideology of the discipline but, even worse, a basis of its practice or attempts at practice. The problem for political science was ultimately, however, less its attachment to this

particular philosophy than its unexamined assumption that formal academic philosophy was in any sense an authoritative guide for the self-understanding and practice of inquiry. The greatest danger was that, with the behavioral image of science already tarnished, critics of orthodox political science would merely cast aside one philosophical reconstruction in favor of another.

The primary challenge was not simply to transform the philosophical or metatheoretical beliefs of political scientists but to explore the relationship between social science and philosophy. Even if considered philosophically adequate, philosophical claims about science and scientific explanation were neither descriptions of scientific practice nor authoritative prescriptions. Ironically, criticisms of positivism in political theory led to even greater dependence on philosophy, as both critics and defenders of the old doctrines sought to legitimate their arguments. Opponents of behavioralism tended to embrace various elements of postpositivist philosophy and to hail it as the basis of a new approach to social science and political theory. Behavioralists, now in the mainstream of political science, discovered counter-revolutionary arguments in the philosophy of science and sought as well to turn ideas of Kuhn and others in their favor.

The problem was not simply that political science had borrowed from philosophy or become philosophically reflective in some general sense. The difficulty was that its problems and terms of analysis were often not of its own making and that it confused theory with metatheory, method with methodology, and explanation with philosophical claims about explanation. The problem all along had not been the autonomy of political science *vis à vis* natural science but its subjugation to philosophical images of science. The need was for what I considered to be theoretical arguments about the substantive character of social and political phenomena.⁹ This did not entail a break with philosophy as discipline or body of literature, since I drew heavily on the philosophy of action, but it did involve a recognition of the limits of epistemology and methodology.

At this point, toward the late 1970s, I began to generalize what I took to be my basic argument about problems in the relationship between metatheory and substantive claims. It became the basis of a broad critique of contemporary political theory as a field of study. One area especially preoccupied with philosophical images, albeit of a somewhat different kind, was the study of historical or traditional political theory. My earlier uneasiness about competing and incommensurable accounts of the great tradition could be explained by viewing them less as historical accounts in any conventional sense than as constructs that served certain rhetorical functions.

The idea of the tradition, which had provided a framework for most political theory in political science since the beginning of the discipline,

could not withstand critical analysis. The more elaborate versions of its frameworks in the postwar period arose in the context of the debates about behavioralism and political theory, and they were heavily influenced by the work of émigré scholars such as Voegelin, Arendt, and Strauss. But these versions were little more than myths. They hypostatized and temporalized philosophical claims about politics, political theory, and theorizing.¹⁰ Much of this material was political commentary with a practical purpose, but its mythical character was becoming a fundamental barrier to critical awareness and reflection. And its restricted academic setting left many of its claims to "political" meaning dubious at best. These evolutionary dramas had outlived their utility and credibility. While my initial focus was on the cognitive alienation of political theory from politics and the manner in which metatheoretical claims constituted a veil between inquiry and its object, I was now becoming increasingly concerned about claims regarding the practical relationship between political theory and politics.

By this time, some found it tempting to believe that the so-called new history of political theory could replace the study of the great tradition. This new historicism was evident in a wide range of literature in the history of political theory, beginning with Peter Laslett's work on Locke, but its most vocal apologists and representatives were J.G.A. Pocock and Quentin Skinner. Although it was in part a reaction against the ahistorical history of the past, it seemed to me to suffer from misconceptions of the relationship between philosophical metatheory and political inquiry. My concern was not so much with the validity of the enterprise as with its tendency to become, in the last analysis, either a philosophical methodology in search of a practice (much like the postpositivist philosophy of social science with which it was closely allied) or a philosophical legitimation of a common historical practice.¹¹ In any event, its claims to a method that achieved historicity were spurious in many ways; and it did little toward developing a theory of texts or an exegetical practice that would support its metatheoretical arguments about the nature of interpretation.

Despite claims of revival, political theory in the 1970s became increasingly alienated from politics and substantive inquiry. It grew more preoccupied with philosophical images of politics and science, especially with the idea of theory.¹² While some regarded work like that of John Rawls or Jürgen Habermas as a powerful and relevant form of normative theorizing, I saw it as another example of the philosophization of political theory and as a quintessential expression of alienated theorizing. Little more than a repetition and elaboration of arguments appropriated from branches of metatheory and philosophy, it connected with its object, politics, about as much as the philosophy of science did with the practice of science. Even its understanding of the relationship was filtered through various philo-

sophical images of theory and practice. Such academic narcissism drew attention away from questions about both politics and political phenomena, and it indicated once more the need for substantive theory.¹³

I now began to recognize, however, that the roots of the alienation of political theory ran deeper than events in the recent history of political theory. Its sources lay in the earlier history of political science as a discipline and the evolution of academic political theory in that context, the origins of social science, and the relationship of modern philosophy to substantive practices of inquiry.¹⁴ The epistemological and transcendental obsession that had characterized philosophy in the nineteenth century had transformed it into a fundamentally alienated enterprise. From the beginning, social science tried to justify and ground its activity in the claims of such philosophy; and political theory had been captured by philosophical images of knowledge and truth. To escape and rethink its situation required a more fundamental criticism of philosophy. As a search for the foundations of knowledge and its mode of acquisition, philosophy was in trouble, and these disabilities were persistently reflected in academic political theory. Furthermore, the academic context of political theory was precisely what had to be confronted if any authentic consideration of its relationship to politics was to take place.

II

Before turning to specific points that have been raised about my arguments, I want to address several broad issues that are variously manifest in the essays and that are crucial in clarifying my position. The first involves a conceptual problem.

Much of my argument is concerned with the relationship between social practices, claims about such practices, and reflection on these claims. We may think of these as first-, second-, and third-order realms of discourse. Sometimes these categorical divisions break nicely along the lines of actual activities such as politics, political science and political theory, and philosophy; but in every instance, my concern is with existential rather than analytical distinctions. In speaking of philosophy, for example, I am not talking about some generic notion of reflection of self-consciousness but about the actual business and literature of academic philosophy. And even within this corpus, different universes of discourse must be distinguished—between, for example, epistemology and the theory of action.

The key point, though, is that these kinds of distinctions neither explicitly nor implicitly deny the possibility, existence, or desirability of various relationships among the practices distinguished. Most of my claims

are about such relationships, and the claims would not be meaningful without the distinctions. For example, I suggest that much political theory fails to think carefully about its actual relationship to politics and often pretends that writing political theory is necessarily political discourse when, in fact, talking about politics is not always the same thing as political speech.

Several preceding essays note, as a matter of information or with varying degrees of critical intent, that some of my claims are at least implicitly self-condemnatory or involve self-criticism. This is certainly true in at least two senses. As indicated above, I have come to reject parts of my previous positions or have developed arguments that supersede them; but more importantly, much of my work belongs to the genre that I call metatheoretical and have criticized as alienated. When the claim is that my criticisms are thus invalidated in some way, I cannot take the argument too seriously. The issue is not simply the metatheoretical character of much political theory, but rather its particular content and attending confusions about the relationship between theory and metatheory and between political theory and political practice. Although I would be quick to admit in some respects to participating in discussions that have contributed to the alienation of political theory, metatheory may not be capable of criticism without metatheoretical arguments. On the whole, the charge that "it takes one to know one" has limits as criticism. There are important problems in distinguishing an authentic vocation for the metatheorist, and I hope that the following discussion is edifying in this respect.

Nelson has noted that I am concerned not only with the myth of the tradition but several myths at the core of contemporary academic political theory. I should specify these pointedly at the outset, since they interrelate in many ways. Although I may not be certain of the way to reconstruct political theory, I am certain that to deconstruct these myths is an absolutely necessary step in rethinking the enterprise.

It is important to be clear about the exact character of the myth of the tradition. Perhaps the most essential element in the myth is treating an analytically constituted tradition—the chronologically arranged classic canon extracted or abstracted from its historical context—as an actual historical tradition. Thus, it is viewed as something to which beginnings and ends, declines, turning points, transformations, and other characteristics can reasonably be attributed in more than a retrospective manner. Most importantly, it is taken to have some sort of holistic internal meaning, as well as meaning for us in the sense of explaining present conditions of politics and political thought. I could continue to list features of the myth, but the most striking fact about reaction to my criticism is that no one has actually argued for the reality of the great tradition. Instead, critics

suggest that my description did not do justice to a particular author, that the myth served some important function, that I still believe in elements of it, that some of its proponents actually knew better, and the like. Even if all of these claims were correct, they would miss the main point, which is to free political theory to take account of itself and its relationship to philosophy and politics.

The myth of the tradition relates closely—and contributes significantly—to the myth of theory. It assumes that theory is not just a (largely analytical) term for talking about some things in science and politics, for example, but refers to a real process, product, or constitutive element in the activities of science and politics. Thus, it reifies concepts of theories, theorists, and theorizing. The myth of theory, the notion that it is a world-historical vocation, is given a past by the idea of the great tradition; it is given a future by, for example, the notion of theory in the science of politics or the claims associated with so-called critical theory. Although most recent battles concern the extent to which modern political science truly can or does embody theory, the very idea of political theory and its historical career is largely an invention of American political science and discourse within its subfield of political theory. More recently, it is an idea that has been sustained by the wider institution of professional political theory that began to emerge in the 1970s.

What I would call the myth of politics is more complicated but again relates to the myth of the tradition. The latter supposes that politics, despite changes in historical form, is somehow a relatively determinate object of knowledge grounded in human nature or the human condition. An essentialist notion of politics is implicit. In much political theory, politics (like its cosmic observer, the political theorist) takes on a kind of transcendental quality. Political theory is transformed into a sort of polidolatriy devoted both to the salvation of politics and to salvation through politics. Politics—or more accurately, philosophical images of politics—also gain a kind of world-historical significance. My argument is that politics is only a historical form of conventional human action. We may want to defend its intrinsic worth or assess critically its particular manifestations, but I reject attempts to link it to transcendental grounds. Furthermore, I am dubious about attempts to identify the political and the sublime.

Political theory has also been particularly susceptible to a set of philosophical claims tied up with myths about transcendental foundations of knowledge, both empirical and normative. These include the myth of the given, largely from the logical-positivist and logical-empiricist tradition in the philosophy of science, which supposes philosophically specifiable realms of fact from theories are derived and against which they are tested. However, it also includes arguments about natural law or other philo-

sophically determinable, transcontextual standards of judgment such as those advanced by Strauss and Voegelin. Forms of this myth appear, for example, in Arendt's notion of the human condition, Habermas's quasi-transcendental claims about human knowledge and interest, and even the implicit notions about human nature that underlie many utilitarian and neoutilitarian approaches to analytical political theory. Finally, there are the various notions of general bases of knowledge derived from epistemology and from the methodological literature of philosophy about the modes of knowledge acquisition. In one form or another, myths of methodology and transcendentalism are at the heart of most contemporary academic political theory; in a very important sense, they are the cause of its alienation.

These are not simply myths of political theory but philosophical myths that cannot be sustained on their own ground. Because political theory not only embraces them but does so unreflectively, on the authority of philosophy, the alienation of political theory is doubled. Yet this philosophical alienation runs even deeper. Despite references to politics and political issues, much of political theory consists mostly of philosophical claims about philosophically constituted issues and objects. It fails either to refer to or engage politics. Before being addressed, politics is mystified—in Marxism, Straussianism, analytical philosophy, and elsewhere. The most important fact about political theory may be that, as a field, it tends to avoid questions about the character of political phenomena. Instead, it pursues transcendent and methodological concerns that in various ways alienate it from politics as both an object and an activity.

Between politics and political theory, there may be a necessary and salutary estrangement that is not a pernicious dimension of alienation, neglect and suppression of the distinction is such a dimension. When the relationship is understood in terms of various philosophical claims about theory and practice, the theorist and politics, or knowledge and power, the actual conditions and roles of theorizing are obscured and mythologized. Political theory continually seeks a philosophical answer to the irreducibly practical problem of the relationship between theory and practice.

Many of the myths of political theory are required for it to play its favorite roles, which almost always involve saying something authoritative about politics. A paradox of political theory is that, unclear about its role, it wants to speak politically yet transpolitically. The latter requires it to seek the authority of knowledge, since it has no automatic authority in politics. While political claims are sometimes based on knowledge, this is seldom the knowledge of philosophy. And while political authority may always be transcendental to some degree, this is because politics is necessarily a world of rhetoric and untruth. If truly political, political theory might

be forced to speak mythically, but at the expense of truth. At present, it lives in the worst of both worlds: myth excluded from politics.

These are complicated issues, but they surface in the following discussion. My main point now, however, is that political theory is largely organized around a set of myths. Although it might be said that I am involved in destroying political theory in order to save it, the "it" to be saved would be elusive. I would rather say that I wish to destroy a number of mythical identities in order to constitute a different enterprise or at least force a more authentic self-consciousness. What would the field contain—if we dispensed with scholarship under the spell of the myth of the tradition—with its summaries and repetitions of the latest philosophical fads and cult figures, with abstract analyses of political concepts presented in the guise of a modern version of the classical canon, and with various metatheoretical arguments now so prominent? I do not presume to have a plan for reconstructing political theory in general, but I think that reconstruction must be the project and that it must begin with a root and branch critique.

Two more issues will return later in specific rejoinders: one involves the idea that there is an implicit or underlying conservatism in my work. Surely this must be assumed to be a "political" conservatism rather than an attitude toward orthodox political theory. The other is sometimes related to this notion but not easily compatible with it. Do—or could—my arguments support a sort of relativism or even nihilism? Without addressing such claims frontally at this juncture, I want to indicate how I disagree with them and the assumptions from which they derive.

My guess is that the concern about political conservatism springs from my tendency to deprecate, or at least call into question, the "political" role of political theory, but this involves no particular conservatism on my part. Instead, it challenges the claims of intellectuals to privileged political knowledge and thereby to political authority—as well as the belief that academic talk about politics is, in this place at this time in any significant sense, political speech. This connects with my doubts that the relationship between academia and politics is understood realistically. The concern about conservatism may also arise from my rejection of philosophical transcendentalism, since many believe that a radical or critical stance requires some such grounding. I do not believe that this is the case; and I even more strongly doubt that such ground can be philosophical, in either a pragmatic or logical sense. This ties closely to my response to the problem of relativism.

There are no philosophically discoverable foundations of knowledge in general and none for science or politics in particular, but this does not call into question the truth-value of claims in these activities. To think otherwise is only to embrace the philosopher's pretension to validate the

world and to sustain the practices on which philosophy is parasitic. These activities are less in danger than the philosopher's image of them. For example, Kuhn threatens not science but a particular philosophical conception of science. Thus, I doubt that to reject foundationalism in political theory is to threaten political order. If it were, then political theory would face a crisis of false consciousness. In the end, worries about conservatism and relativism spring from the same source, my rejection of foundationalism, even though their conjunction might seem paradoxical.

III

Since Wolin's essay catalyzed this symposium, I will address it first. One difficulty in doing so is that motives, attitudes, and beliefs are at issue—both his and mine. Wolin feels that my discussion of his work fails to capture, for example, his political intention; and he refers to what I regard as a rather literal analysis and interpretation of his work as charges, ridicule, indictments, and allegations. Clarifying what one is doing with words is not always easy, but my intention was to describe and explain the various works associated with the myth of the tradition. My motive was decidedly iconoclastic, but my purpose was to convey accurately what he had said.

Wolin begins with an extended portrait of the cast of mind that he calls methodism. This image is somewhat abstract, but it strikes me as closely related to my own criticisms of the dominance of the idea of method and the impact of methodology on social science and political theory. In fact, since methodism involves resistance to "doing theory politically" and "engaging the political theoretically," it seems virtually identical to what I call the alienation of political theory. Hence, I was a little surprised to find that, according to Wolin, I am a methodist, committed to denaturing political theory. There is, I suppose, a sense in which both claims are correct, but it is not the sense that Wolin suggests.

If Wolin's characterization of methodism is abstract, so is this picture of political theory. It clearly is supposed to represent what he does or wishes to do, yet it is an activity that seems less than concretely situated and specified. But there is a mysticism about his notion of the vocation of theory that bothers me as much as the mysticism of method. The issues involved are too complex to be understood in terms of some cosmic battle between methodism and political theory; and as long as discussion is confined by these symbols, the issues will remain opaque. Throughout Wolin's essay, there is a problem with distinguishing between my claims about what political theory is and my claims about what it should be. Since the problem

may be a product of my own ambiguity, I welcome the opportunity to clarify the issue.

Wolin claims that the context for reading my arguments about the myth of the tradition is the postbehavioral period in which for many the practical use of political theory is no longer an issue. I do think that this is largely the case in mainstream political science, where political theory is accepted and neatly compartmentalized within the highly pluralistic structure of the discipline. What political theorists say and do simply does not matter any more to political science in the way that it did in the 1950s and 1960s, but it is equally true that political theory has estranged itself from political science. Contributors to the myth of the tradition have had a somewhat exaggerated view of the practical importance of political theory; but once it lost—or relinquished—its role as a critic of behavioralism, it lost a large portion of its field of action.

My concern is surely not to aid in “solemnizing” the “depoliticization” of political theory—except in the sense that I want to note where it actually stands in political science and indicate the gap between its political intentions, or pretensions, and its actual practice as an academic activity. Does such realism contribute to “its transformation into an atheoretical subject”? If so, then I suppose that I must plead guilty; but this only seems to point to the fragility of political theory, both practically and theoretically, and its failure to think authentically about itself.

In tone and substance, Wolin’s essay suggests that my criticism of the myth of the tradition somehow betrays what political theory represented when it stood alone in holding the line against behavioralism. Since Wolin seldom directly confronts my claims about the tradition, I must assume that his concern centers on this strategic problem of the academic and political mission of political theory. I am not, however, as hard on those associated with the myth of the tradition as Wolin implies. I recognized their role as critics of scientism and behavioralism, and I have emphasized their practical or political motives. What I wanted to demonstrate was that the idea of the tradition has been in danger of devolving into a dogma, that it is in many ways obsolete as a critique of political science, and that its actual “politicalness” demands examination.

Regardless of how noble the sentiments attached to it, the myth of the tradition is not sacred and inviolate. Precisely the notion that it should somehow be exempt from challenge or even reflection points to a dilemma regarding political theory’s inability to define its context. My claim is not that these individuals “violated some standard of theorizing” by using historical commentary as a “surrogate” for the “genuine article” of political speech but rather that it is necessary to understand what was going on and to view it realistically. I agree that behavioralism was in many ways

an apology for American liberal pluralism, and all of those whom I associated with the myth of the tradition were in one way or another involved in a critique of this political form. I might agree that this was a worthy undertaking, although I am not sure that it was effective or pursued in the best manner. My main concern, however, was that it could not—or could no longer—justify the mythology that had grown up around the ideas of tradition and theory. It is not so much that I am unpolitical (or at least any less so than most academic political theorists) and want to apply a methodological scalpel to the tender membranes of political theory but that I am skeptical, on several counts, about both the actual political import of the enterprise and the validity of its self-image.

To say, as Wolin does, that I criticize four political theorists for being at once poor historians and inept theorists is an exaggeration; and to the extent that he is correct, his characterization does not entail the paradox that he suggests. I attempted to demonstrate how historical arguments, or arguments with a historical form, have been deployed in political theory—and some of the ambiguities and problems that have arisen as a result. He claims that my book does not directly engage the question of what a political theory is, but I reject the essentialist and mythical assumptions involved in even posing that question. The purpose in the book in question was limited largely to providing a critical analysis of the field of the history of political theory. It had no single purpose—particularly not to depoliticize theory and gut history of theoretical interest.

In talking about the myth of the tradition, I have always admitted to talking about individuals who are different in many significant respects. My point is that their arguments are also similar in both a generic and genetic sense, and they have all contributed to a myth with a great impact on the field. My prime concern has not been with them as individuals or with all facets of their work but rather with their contributions to this paradigm. Quite reasonably, Wolin suggests that I should focus more on the paradigm workers who unself-consciously accept the myth. But my particular aim has been to illuminate the basic character and source of the myth of the tradition, to look at its most articulate and influential statements, rather than to emphasize and catalogue what seems obvious—its ubiquity. Finally, with respect to this range of issues, while Wolin claims that I fail to provide sufficient evidence that *the* tradition does not exist, I respond that my purpose is not to prove a negative but to scrutinize positive claims for its existence.

Wolin's principal concern, once again, is less with the content of my argument than with its motive and impact. My alleged "inconsistencies" are, for him, less important than the "reason" for them. Wolin argues that I fail to differentiate political theory and the history of it (shades of Strauss!)

and that my project is less to clarify the study of the history of political theory than to quarrel with the idea of political theory as political. This, he claims, is the way the methodist conducts the politics of theory, by taking theory out of its political context and examining it as an academic project. It seems to me, however, that I stressed the practical motive, making it abundantly clear that this material could not be approached literally as academic history or judged in that way. I grant that this concern is genuine, but it hardly secures the enterprise or automatically answers all the resulting questions about history, politics, and theory. It especially does not mean that it is political simply because he wants it to be so.

My alleged misreading (of what I am not exactly sure) is said to be "a sign of (my) profound suspicion of theorizing and (my) impulse to contain its politicalness." While I am suspicious of academic political theory, my suspicion arises from the distance between what it is and what it conceives itself to be. I am particularly suspicious when people conflate academic political theory with some generic, world-historical vision of theory, which is, in the end, mythical. This is the essence of the myth of the tradition and the alienation of political theory. I want not so much to contain the political character of political theory as to examine the extent to which it really has a such a character and the way it asserts authority to make political claims.

Where is the politicalness of which Wolin speaks: in its motives, actions, effects, subject matters, rhetoric, language, or where? What is the criterion of political theory being political? These are the issues elided in the myths that inform academic political theory. Wolin mentions Rawls and Habermas as though their names were some self-evident demonstration, but their work precisely requires these questions. To speak categorically about politics or evince political concern does not, in any significant sense, make political theory political. Neither in the book nor in my response to Pocock do I indicate what adequate "contact" with politics would be; nor, at least in these places, do I address political issues. But I never pretended to do so.

It is also quite true that I have not addressed either Wolin's or Arendt's political writings. (Does Wolin imply that Voegelin and Strauss have produced none?) Yet the reasons for this should be clear. As stated in the book, my concern was not with the whole corpus of their work but with the myth of the tradition. Besides, I am tempted to ask, for example, what count as Arendt's political writings. This is not a sly way of suggesting that she had none, but the criteria for answering such questions are exactly what are neglected. Wolin says that he and Arendt did in fact use the history of political theory instrumentally, but this is what I wanted to point out to those who have taken such work as literal claims about history.

In no significant sense do I disagree with Wolin's reasons for studying the history of political theory. These ideas of education and tacit knowledge, while not exclusive, are all reasonable from my perspective. I am positively enthusiastic about the notion of studying the history of political theory as an exercise in critical and theoretical thinking. I even sympathize in many respects with what I take to be Wolin's "politics" and his choice of issues to engage in political writing. But the quality of beliefs does not confer immunity from critical analysis or vouchsafe the claims of academic political theory to be political. I am not convinced that what Wolin calls "communing with traditions"—particularly fictitious ones—is the best vehicle for critical thought. If the regime in modern America is antihistorical and antitheoretical, as Wolin claims, I would not in principle fault rhetorical uses of history and theory in criticizing it; but neither would I accept the claims as inviolate or assume that such rhetoric in an academic context is significantly political.

The notion that I want to depoliticize history is an incredible extrapolation from my analysis of the myth of the tradition. Still, I would maintain that there are limits to using academic history politically in a setting where criticism is to be expected, and there are limits to the extent to which the past can be made to bear the burden of criticizing the present. It is a bit strange to be caught between Pocock's claim that I am still imprisoned within the myth of the tradition and Wolin's claim that I want to methodologize and depoliticize history. With Pocock, I think that it might be better, as a critical move, to focus on trying to say how things really happened in history. Pocock, however, takes me to defend what he believes to be the latest version of "everyone his own historian," which he in turn attributes to Gadamer. Wolin, on the other hand, reads Gadamer as a warrant for politicized history. I doubt that Wolin can really call upon Gadamer, and I think that Pocock reads Gadamer incorrectly as simply the proponent of a different historical method. I would strongly caution against both of these readings of Gadamer, and I flatly reject identifying my arguments with either him or his opponents.

To group me with Pocock and Skinner seems strange when I criticize them on several grounds—especially with regard to methodology. Indeed, I argue that their project really is a residue of the myth of the tradition, *sans* its practical concern. Yet Wolin insists that my real "target" is political theory as practiced by the classic authors and interpreters of the tradition (a questionable parallel) and that my aim is to confine it within arid academic boundaries. Actually, I argue that it already is so confined. Unlike Pocock and others who see my last chapter as a remnant of romantic attachment to the myth of the tradition, Wolin reads it as a description of something appalling to me. He thinks me relieved that classic political theory had

little impact on the world. Neither reading has much to do with my argument in that chapter or my reasons for advancing it. Surely, it is not a plea for a "decorous" political theory or an attempt, for "political" reasons, to close off critical thought as trivial or pathological.

According to Wolin, once I emasculate political theory, I retrieve most of its features through the back door of my last chapter. It would be more accurate to say that once I eliminate the basic features of the myth of the tradition, I suggest one perspective for analyzing the traditional canon and various reasons for doing so. This involves historical sensitivity to the features that these works share. Some of those features were incorporated in the myth of the tradition, as I point out, but never have I contended that its particular features were simple fantasy or that there were no bases for construing the classic texts as an analytically constituted tradition.

Wolin never lets go of the notion that I want to "devitalize political theory," but this claim is persuasive only if political theory is identified with one of the myths that I criticize. One of the difficulties with political theory is that, much like the orthodox literature that governed the philosophy of science for so long, it has come to identify itself with its subject matter and, in turn, to identify that subject matter in terms of one particular paradigmatic reconstruction. Those philosophers understood themselves as master scientists and saw their account of science as identical with science—and consequently suggested that disagreement with the account, and with them, was a rejection of science. Similarly, orthodox political theory, such as that grounded in the myth of the tradition, tends to take criticism of that myth and its supporters as a deprecation of both theory and politics. Academic political theorists are neither the priests nor prophets of politics, and my goal is simply to force a reasoned consideration of the actualities and possibilities of the relationship between academic and public discourse in the context of their present configuration.

Academic political theory is in a strange position. Its commitment to the idea of truth puts it, at least in principle, in continual tension with politics which, necessarily, is based on illusions. Political conventions, however, are viable only when they are not understood as simply conventions but as representing some higher truth. With Plato, we may believe that the best illusions are those that serve truth; but in no special way that I can see is a truth beyond political truth accessible to academic political theorists. I might not be happy with judgments made in America's heartland, but I am no more sanguine about their determination in Frankfurt, Chicago, Cambridge, and Princeton. Politics requires constructing as well as destroying, and maybe political theory should then be in the business of building as well as criticizing. But this means that it can no longer speak truthfully, even if it believes itself to serve truth. Wolin implies a special

role for the (academic) political theorist, one so noble that it seemingly must not be challenged. Those who call it into question are antipolitical and antitheoretical, if not antidemocratic. Much academic political theory expresses democratic values, but very little indicates a belief in democracy. Nearly all academic political theory is polidolatrous, but little manifests faith in politics. It wants to speak politically without engaging in politics. It is committed to theory, but its theories are philosophical myths. These are the dilemmas, and they are not solved by pretending that they do not exist.

Wolin suggests that I perform "contortions" to fit my four major figures into the same mold. He likens this to treating Jung and Freud as similar. Yet this is approximately the character of my argument. Sharing the idea of the unconscious is comparable to sharing a belief in the tradition. Although Wolin argues that the myth of the tradition is not the proper context for understanding his work and that he never talked as if there were any such thing as "the tradition," this seems literally incorrect, as well as interpretively counterfactual. Certainly this point could be argued, and I remain more than willing to grant that each writer at issue fits my ideal typification in varying degrees. Still, the typification is drawn exclusively from their works. I have suggested that Wolin was more vulnerable than most to criticism in terms of historicity, but this means only that he was less explicit or self-conscious about the instrumental use of history than Arendt or Strauss, that he was more a prisoner of the myth than its creator. Yet this is another claim on which I would not insist. I would be satisfied to note, as Wolin admits, that his notions of history and tradition have not been fully worked out.

Finally, Wolin rebuts my criticism of his use of Kuhn's work by replying that I missed his "political point" and "irony" in using Kuhn critically when political scientists deployed him apologetically. In fact, I missed this not at all. My objection is to his particular claim about a "similarity" between science and politics, not to his reasons for discussing that similarity. His "analogy" does not stand up very well, despite its rhetorical force and purpose. Wolin stresses that political society is to the theorist as nature is to the scientist, and thus he believes me to miss the point when I say that Cromwell was more the counterpart of Newton than Hobbes. But any strict analogy with Kuhn would mean that nature is like society's view of the world, society is like the community of science, great political actors are like revolutionary scientists. Hobbes would be more like a philosopher of science than like a destroyer and creator of scientific paradigms. Coherent or not, the analogy does suggest how Wolin attempts to give a greater political role to classic texts—and by further strained

allusion, to academic political theory—than I believe to be historically sustainable.

IV

Since Tarcov's essay deals almost entirely with Strauss and the idea of the tradition, I turn now to it. Tarcov's claim that my interpretation of Strauss does not do full justice to the complexities of Strauss's arguments must be accepted. I have since attempted to deal with Strauss's project in more depth.¹⁵ As with Wolin, however, I focused less on Strauss than on the way in which he contributed to the myth of the tradition. Tarcov's detailed qualifications contribute to a better understanding of Strauss's work, and only in a few instances would I quibble with the emendations suggested.

Strauss may not consistently have pressed the ideas that the tradition had a definite beginning and that classical political philosophy is unique. Still, he sought to evoke a virgin quality of Greek politics and insisted that Greek political philosophy achieved an immaculate perception of the nature of political things. He does emphasize Socrates more than I had indicated, but Aristotle remains the central figure in his vision of the tradition. The discussion of Machiavelli deserves more attention than I gave it, and the image of the tradition as a decline is probably not as schematic in Strauss's work as I suggested. I agree with Tarcov that Strauss was neither a "simple nonhistoricist" nor a "dogmatic historian," but I do not believe that I implied otherwise. For Strauss, the use of history and its relationship to political philosophy are complex issues. When I say that he had a practical purpose in writing about the history of political philosophy, I mean only that his intentions were not merely, or even primarily, exegetical. As Tarcov notes, there is a sense in which Strauss's discussion of the modern crisis is a tease. Yet belief in the existence of a crisis, or belief in the need to propagate the image of crisis, was the practical impetus of Strauss's project. Tarcov may be right that Strauss was more concerned to demonstrate how fascism grew out of liberalism than to call liberalism into question. Although his principal aim may have been less to undercut liberalism than to find a solution to its decline, he did see it as a residue of mistakes that require questioning and reformation. To a large extent, I now qualify the claim that Strauss's arguments were motivated by the behaviorist attack on political theory.¹⁶

Despite these qualifications, I see little reason for changing my basic claims about the image of the tradition that Strauss fostered, let alone its impact not only on his dedicated followers but on the field of political

theory as a whole. Tarcov's claim that my last chapter tends to accept what I earlier rejected is, as I have already indicated, simply to miss what the myth really involves. And the rhetorical character of the myth leads me to doubt that Strauss really meant to invite debate and confess ignorance. I agree with Tarcov regarding the inseparability for Strauss of interpretation and critique, but I believe that Strauss's work exemplifies the dilemma of academic political theory and its relationship to politics. Strauss has not been the only one forced to violate self-imposed principles, such as understanding authors as they understood themselves, in order to convey a political message in philosophical terms.

V

Kateb's essay is much like Wolin's in dealing with motifs and motives allegedly underlying my arguments, and it provides another convenient vehicle for clarifying what I said and why. Kateb argues that my last chapter threatens to burden the study of history of political theory with a rigidity that prevents fruitful access to the classic texts by confining them to their original historical contexts. Furthermore, he claims that, although I make a token attempt to save the greats by noting their intellectual heroism in their own times, I treat them as little use to their contemporaries and even less to us. But as I have already stressed, one purpose of the last chapter is to "save" the canon by showing similarities in the texts and the historical contexts of their production. This is not an exclusive rationale, and intellectual heroism is only one of the family resemblances drawn. My aim is not to restrict our access to texts but rather to free them from the myth of the tradition so that they may be studied and used in more fruitful ways. My requirement of a certain historical consciousness would make the texts more available to us by casting off the shroud of myth that has hidden them for so long. I do not know why Kateb associates me so closely with Pocock and Skinner nor why he takes me to imply that classic texts lack relevance or resonance in the present. I claimed explicitly that there are many ways in which the classics might be relevant; I merely demur from the automatic, dramatic, and circumscribed relevance claimed by the myth of the tradition.

I do not wish, in any authoritative manner, to exclude "nonheroic" writers from the ranks of political theorists. I emphasized that my last chapter's use of "theorist" was merely analytical; it carries none of the essentialism that marks the myth of the tradition. Where I write of the tension between political theory and the open society, I also take pains to be clear that "political theory" means only the genre which I have analytically

constituted. Kateb believes that "community" appears decisively in my work and betrays my attachment to the Berkeley thesis. Perhaps my emphasis on the tension between the theorist and society is rooted in my past, but my point is only that intellectual radicalism or the idea of political philosophy as action has been paradoxical in a pluralistic society where no exclusive community is challenged. To suggest that this claim indicates a distaste for the open society is as much off the mark as Wolin's strikingly different speculations about my politics and attitude toward heroism.

Although my definition of "theorist" excludes Kateb's "democratic" theorists such as Mill and Rawls, to deny them inclusion in this one category is not to deny them very much, and it certainly is not to make them any less theorists in some other categorical sense. Kateb's point only carries weight for essentialist notions of theory or theorist. But the issue is complicated by the fact that, on different grounds dealing with the alienation of recent political theory, I have problems with the work of someone such as Rawls and the common claim that such work is similar to the classic texts and constitutes the revival of the tradition. This both assumes the reality of the tradition and ignores the whole issue of the status of contemporary academic political theory.

Kateb makes an eloquent case for the practical use of classic texts. My response is only that this notion remains vague in his analysis and little different from what may be said about the study of English literature. Above all, Kateb wants to demonstrate the theoretical use of classics, particularly for increasing political understanding. I could not, in principle, agree more; I even cite this as the primary rationale for studying the history of political theory. Kateb's exact notion of theoretical utility, however, strikes me as elusive. He mentions nothing that seems persuasively associated with those particular works. The need for such specificity is precisely why I urge more historical attention to their actual content and context.

I agree when Kateb rejects the study of the history of theory as a search for the foundations of morality. My critique of the myth of the tradition, and the idea of foundationalism in general, should leave no ambiguity on this score. But Kateb seems to believe that, since many of the greats appear to have looked for foundations, we must find a way to excuse them and free them from this limitation. I see no need to purify the history of political theory in order to think about it in relevant and creative ways. For example, it may be more interesting to think about why the greats sought foundations and how much they really believed in such transcendental grounds. Kateb implies that the last chapter's ideal typification of political theory embodies my own prescriptions, but it does not. It only tries to show some of what the works in question share theoretically and to find perspective that is fruitful for approaching them.

Finally, Kateb asks why we should not find methodological wisdom in the classics. Why not, indeed! I support whatever inspiration and wisdom we can derive from classic texts—or anywhere else. But Kateb's emphasis on theoretical, practical, and methodological utility echoes an element of the old myth: the idea that classic texts have some definitive and authoritative message for us. For instance, he wants us never to forget that classic writers were "theorists" after all. As my last chapter explains, any generalizations about their identity should be derived from who they actually were and not from *a priori* images of theorists and theorizing.

Kateb's plea for deeper textual analysis is precisely my plea, and my principal complaint about the new historicism is that it has offered little in this regard. I endorse also Kateb's prescription for creative and relevant analysis that understands authors better than they understood themselves. It is best achieved, however, by an initial historical focus that would not so much imprison the texts in their own times as release us from the prisons of our own assumptions. In the end, there seems little real quarrel between Kateb and me. My critique of the myth of the tradition is, above all, a deconstructive effort designed to break down rigidities that have come to govern the study of the history of political theory.

VI

Flathman concurs with many criticisms made by others. Nonetheless, my argument may be further clarified by a systematic response to several of his incisive points. His comments, however, require me to reiterate once more that in neither intent nor effect does my last chapter reinstitute the myth of the tradition. The elements that made it a myth are gone. Even if readers construe the chapter to contain residual elements of the myth, this recognizes that the myth is in fact a myth, and that is my main concern. The last chapter offers little more than a pragmatic idiom for retaining a vestige of the canon. Although that chapter emphasizes several particular texts, it does not pose a model for judging all work that might be construed on one basis or another as political theory. Even so, I see a certain justification for Flathman and others to arrive at that conclusion.

Much academic political theory, including behavioralism, plays on the notion that it is either a direct ancestor of the classic texts or functionally similar to them. I fundamentally challenge this idea. Flathman reads this as drawing an invidious distinction between the heroic past and the faint-hearted present, but my basic concern is to demonstrate that they differ dramatically. Above all, they differ because, in an important sense, they are not comparable. The heroic past is only an analytically and interpretively

constituted tradition, while academic theory is a distinct practice with a real historical past. When I do compare them, it is only to demonstrate that neither categorically nor individually do the classic texts and the genre or genres they represent have much to do with what political theory is or is likely to be. That Flathman attributes to me a greater sympathy for these grand visions than I hold in fact strikes me as odd when others such as Wolin believe (also incorrectly) that I am appalled by them. My concerns and attitudes do not divide along such neat lines. I do argue that many of these authors, as a class, had a very different relationship to politics than do contemporary academic political theorists. But little follows automatically from this, except that much recent theory is obscured by addressing it in terms of images of the classics. I see no particular answers to the status of contemporary political theory in a recollection of the past.

Quite legitimately, Flathman questions some of my characterizations of individuals (such as Plato) and their contexts. But those are only hypothetical, capsulized historical and interpretive claims. The last chapter neither elaborates nor defends them in any detail. I would be happy to support my arguments about Plato's texts and their historical setting against what Flathman finds to be the more persuasive views of Pascal and Arendt. To a limited degree, I do so elsewhere."¹⁷ These are precisely the issues that I am eager to see joined. But I doubt that they can be joined in such a case as Arendt, since this was not her real concern. Plato plays a role in her saga of the West, and it would be about as useful to argue the point of Plato with her as to argue the meaning of Machiavelli with Strauss, the meaning of pre-Socratics with Heidegger, or the meaning of Galileo with Brecht.

Flathman says that I fail to confront the basic conflict between the enterprise of philosophy or theory and the instrumental objectives that I find embodied in the classic texts. Yet it seems to me that I stress the pathos and paradox of their projects that arise from this very conflict. My stipulative definition of these authors as theorists, however, is not intended to support general claims about theory and practice; and my purpose is not to suggest, in some abstract sense, that the gap between theory and practice could—or should—be eliminated.

For Flathman, I am like Gadamer in repudiating the search for intentions; yet, he points out, I characterize theorists in terms of their intentions. I cannot reply fully to this claim, because unpacking all that is involved would take too long. Instead, let me hazard a short answer. First, Gadamer's treatment of intention is more complicated than Flatham indicates. Second, I am no unqualified partisan of Gadamer's theory of intentionality, even though I have come to a certain idea of the theoretical identity of linguistic, mental, and behavioral intentionality.¹⁸ To a large degree, I embrace what

I take to be both Gadamer's and Wittgenstein's claim: that intentionality is a function of language. But the main point is the third one: no connections, beyond those explicitly stated, should be assumed between my discussion of the philosophy of interpretation in the fourth chapter and my claims in the last chapter. These are quite distinct endeavors, and I do not discuss Gadamer either to bury him or to praise him.

Flathman is correct that I am suspicious of philosophy and that I want to distinguish it from political theory. He is also correct that my own arguments are grounded in philosophy, even though I criticize such philosophical political theory as that of Rawls, Pocock, and Habermas. This raises issues central to Flathman's concerns and demanding further clarification.

As I have indicated, I seldom refer to philosophy in some generic sense of reflection. For the most part, I talk about the literature of academic philosophy. Even there, I concentrate on particular trends associated with metatheoretical arguments in ethics, the philosophy of social science, the philosophy of science, and especially epistemology. Academic philosophy is not all of one piece. I distinguish certain work in areas such as the philosophies of language, action, and mind because it involves what I have referred to as substantive theoretical claims about the character of social phenomena. These are relevant to theory understood as a concern with the ontology of politics.

Since, as I have stressed repeatedly, there are great differences between the classic authors and writers singled out by Flathman as political theorists, only at a very high level of abstraction can they be viewed as involved in the same enterprise. The distinction becomes important when persuasive allusions are allowed to prejudice arguments about the character of present political theory. The point is not to deny anyone the title of "political theorist" but to respect certain distinctions between the variety of works comprising the classic canon and those constituting the practice of contemporary political theory in the academic world. This is a preface to concrete arguments about each and their relationship to politics.

Flathman asks how writers who use political concepts and intend to talk about politics can fail to do so. My answer is my arguments about the alienation of political theory. Rather than rehearse them, let me add that a similar failure occurs in many contributions to the philosophy of science, which use scientific concepts and intend to talk about science but in fact do not. "Political concepts" may mean concepts used in talking *about* politics (as part of such activities as political science and political theory) or concepts used in political speech (within politics). These are not mutually exclusive, but there is no justification for jumping with Flathman to the conclusion that every use of political concepts is "undeniably"

political. Such a distinction does not close off relationships between political theory and politics, but it reminds us that they are relationships and not identities.

For many years, academic political theory predicated its claim to knowledge about politics, its authority for politics, and even (to some extent) its identity with politics on the assumption of its special relationship to the realm of ideas and (in turn) on the special relationship of that realm to politics. Ideas were assumed to be the critical force in politics. To understand them, both historically and currently, was to understand politics; and to change them or sustain them (by education, persuasion, or scientific demonstration) was in large measure to engage politics. This was the image that academic political theory projected. Although this idealism (in both senses) fell on bad times by the 1950s, the linguistic turn in philosophy provided a basis for its resurrection. Notions of political theory as the interpretation of historical languages, critical and hermeneutical reflection, rhetoric, conceptual analysis, etc. all play upon the theme that language (rather than ideas) is the bridge between theory and practice and is even the basis of a certain identity between political theory and politics. Politics is language, and political theory is in the language business. Therefore, it is argued, political theory is a kind of virtual politics or at least has authoritative descriptive and prescriptive knowledge. Much of what I have to say seeks to challenge this kind of argument.

At this point, escaping the question of the status of Flathman's own work is probably impossible, since that may be an underlying but unstated issue. This work is not specifically the target of my criticisms about contemporary political theory, but the basic genre does fall into categories that I have associated with the alienation of political theory. In such work, a concept such as justice is discriminated. Its meaning is largely stipulated, and that meaning is justified in terms of a general claim about human beings or society. By then, the concept seems to carry some political prescription (which often reflects a particular ideology), yet it seldom engages existential political issues in any concrete way. It remains confined within the rarified world of academic discourse, despite the fact that it is supposed to reveal and say something about politics as a form of life. Much, but certainly not all, analytical political theory manifests this syndrome.

Flathman speculates that my basic animus toward much postpositivistic political theory springs from an antipathy for the open, nonheroic society in which it flourishes. Although incorrect, this is perceptive. I am not antimodernist, but I am concerned about how academic political theory is neutralized by being made totally safe and about the extent to which it flourishes because it is little more than a form of symbolic actions (while pretending to be much more). Flathman tries to situate me within various

schemes relating theory to practice—including those of Oakeshott, Marx, Easton, and Foucault. Finally, he decides that I have a peculiarly hybrid view of the idea that political theory ought to speak to politics.

He argues that in this view I contradict myself by claiming that philosophy must almost invariably fail to contact politics while saying that it not only ought to do so but must. How can I condemn philosophy as impractical at a categorical level that makes it so by definition and yet expect it to be practical at the particular level? Do I, Flathman asks, reject the work in journals such as *Philosophy and Public Affairs* or that is such areas as medical ethics and legal philosophy? If we read Wittgenstein, Flathman concludes, we must see that there can never be a chasm between philosophy and practice, even though they are different. These are pointed arguments, and they provide an opportunity to clarify my position.

My concern is not at all with categorical differences between theory and practice but with recognizing some existential differences, in the present context, among forms of discourse such as politics, academic political theory, and philosophy. These are distinct practices, even though they may be related. Thus, we should discuss what the relationships really are, as well as what they can and even should be. My concern is with cases where political theory masquerades as talk about politics, or even political talk, when it is really only talk about philosophical images. Much literature in political theory and public policy is of this kind. Of course, academic discourse has a political context; but, in itself, that says little.

Certainly philosophy can to some degree change the world—for example, through education. Perhaps epistemology can in some way change science as a practice. As Flathman suggests, this must be decided case by case. But I remain bothered by two pretensions of second-order discourse: that it has access to foundations of knowledge which gives it some special authority over its object and that speaking about the object is indistinguishable from engaging in the practices which constitute it. I have no notion that philosophy should be barred from speaking either about or to politics. But I share Weber's concerns both about political authority and influence flowing from the authority of knowledge and about the instrumentalization of knowledge. I also share his belief that categorically conceived tensions between the vocation of science (searches for truth, understanding, etc.) and the vocation of politics (power, interest, illusion) are exemplified in the practical world of the relationship between the academic community and politics.

It would be a great mistake to assume, as Flathman seems to do occasionally, that I take Wittgenstein to be a paradigm case of alienated philosophy. Quite the opposite is the case. I view Wittgenstein as rejecting the epistemological and transcendental quests. Were Flathman to refer to

Wittgenstein for assurance that political theory is inextricably enmeshed in societal forms of life, I would not disagree. But I do disagree that such a reference warrants the assumption that there cannot be a chasm between universes of discourse and forms of life. Wittgenstein's work may indicate the possibility of communication, but it does not guarantee it. Much political theory reflects Wittgenstein's notion of an engine idling. It involves a lot of talk about nonobjects in a noncontext. Most academic political theory and philosophy lacks concern with the particularity of politics. Since it could easily be *about* the particularity of politics without being part of it, I would not want to argue that it cannot touch politics or that it is "merely" theory and philosophy. But neither its effect nor authority can be presupposed uncritically.

Last, Flathman suggests that I really opt for returning to the kind of work done by those I criticized in connection with the myth of the tradition. He worries that I am a "reactionary" who would banish analytical reflection and that, even though I occasionally praise people such as Pocock, I do not favor his methodological self-consciousness. I totally reject such extrapolations, and they do not express my position. I am not generally against philosophy, but I do not believe that it is synonymous with knowledge and virtue.

VII

My quarrel with philosophy is with the epistemological tradition and other modes that are estranged from the practices of life yet claim authority over them. This quarrel runs much deeper than Hanson suggests when he says that I want to get beyond epistemology because it poses questions that cannot be settled and never provides theoretical substance. I do not believe that epistemology, as an autonomous concern with general foundations of knowledge, is defensible in any sense. Hanson also mistakes my position when he claims that my notion of the theory of action entails abandoning "subversive" theory of the kind that I depict in the classics.

Since some believe my last chapter to reject the classics while others take it to reinstate them, it obviously needs clarification. I do not reject the genre discussed in my last chapter; I only say that such intellectual heroism may not find a field of action in modern society. I argue explicitly that, although it may seem dull compared with the myth of the tradition, action theory can be a strong instrument of criticism. Like most of the classic texts, action theory recognizes the conventional character of political and social arrangements. It provides a basis not simply for questioning particular values but even for challenging people's very assumptions about

political reality.¹⁹ The real issue, however, is not what kind of claims might in some hypothetical sense be subversive but rather what would the practice of subversive academic political theory look like.

Hanson finds a model for critical theory in the work of Habermas and company; but, in my view, this approach has definite problems.²⁰ First, these authors, as well as their admirers such as Hanson, largely beg the main issue here: the relationship between such academic political theory and politics. Theory and practice is approached as a philosophical issue and solved accordingly. Seldom do the advocates of critical theory really deal with the particularities of politics. Instead, they project abstract images of present and future politics and concentrate on elaborating general notions of the activity of theory and its access to truth. Most of its claims are an eclectic mixture of various transcendental arguments in the philosophy of history, epistemology, and the philosophy of science. These are already alienated and function as little more than crude apologies for ideological positions which are seldom developed very concretely. Such theory and the large body of literature devoted to summarizing and repeating it have done little to make political theory more than an academic exercise. To find this particular mode of work lacking is hardly tantamount to condemning political theory in general to a mere academic existence or attempting to stop it from changing the world.

Hanson also believes that he detects a subtle positivism and conservatism in my notion of action theory and its assumption about the givenness of conventions; but when I speak of action as conventional, it is distinguished from the nonconventional, not the unconventional. The very idea of political reality as conventional entails the notion of openness to change, and givenness here refers to a *kind* of phenomena and not instances of it. I have no problem with Hanson's idea of breaking with tradition or with his way of looking at the classic texts. In fact, they seem the same as what I have been stressing. Unfortunately, Hanson's claims remain at the level of general prescriptions. They give little indication of how academic political theory can or could take on tasks of social change. Some of the classic authors may have had hubristic visions of their enterprise; but most were more realistic and politically involved than current academic theorists.

For political theory to play a role, such as the one that Hanson ascribes to Marx, it must reach an audience. Hanson recognizes this and says that it can be achieved through narrative history: a kind of storytelling to serve a rhetorical function. To the extent that this were the argument of someone actually engaged in a political movement, it might be taken seriously. In its academic context, however, it faces the danger of becoming a self-conscious exercise in bad faith. It presumes that academic political theory has some access to truth or occupies a special position that not only justifies

the noble lie but also deserves freedom from the critical scrutiny. It also presumes some significant dimension of contact between academic political theory and politics. Hanson claims that he does not want to minimize the difficulties of such a project, yet he fails to face up to either its justification or its difficulties. Hanson argues that the task of academic political theorists is to subvert the present in the name of the future. If so, and if the test of academic political theory is a practical one, I doubt that we can have much hope for either social change or effective political theory. Subversive political theory is not an image I reject, but it is in danger of becoming an academic fantasy that obscures the real condition of political theory and renders impotent the very project it advocates.

VIII

Kress continues the case for a critical theory; and although I am more sympathetic with his analysis, it shares many of Hanson's difficulties. Kress believes, as I do, that academic political theory is alienated. As a field, it has failed to provide a concrete critical analysis of politics and political practice and remains absorbed in metatheoretical issues. But he finds little hope for a solution in my work. Kress argues that I draw on much of the same literature in philosophy that has led to this alienation and that my work remains idealist, even Hegelian. Ultimately, my sympathies, he suggests, still lie with the myth of the tradition—or at least, I tend to shuttle between camps as a pluralist or accommodationist.

Although I reject these characterizations, I can hardly claim that I have done much to advance the cause of professional academic political theory as social criticism. But I am unsure about what kind of project this would be. Surely, specifying and constituting its form is a fundamental challenge. I have argued that some of the alienation of political theory could be, and has been, overcome merely by *addressing* substantive political issues: not by mentioning them or alluding to them in the course of some abstract analysis of justice, not by reconstituting them as philosophical problems with philosophical solutions, but by moralizing about them, not by backing claims about them with purportedly transcendental knowledge, but in a number of ways by engaging them in their particularity. My other recommendation relates less to posture and is more "theoretical" in character. It is also more fundamental. The principal task of political theory, I believe, is to question and explore the nature of political phenomena. I do not mean that political theory should ape the philosophy of social science, where general claims are used to support abstract notions of explanation. I mean something systematic, detailed, and substantive. To

talk about politics descriptively, prescriptively, or in other ways is, or should be, predicated on claims about what kind of thing is being talked about. This is what I take to be theory: political ontology.

These recommendations, however, speak only to the cognitive alienation of political theory. The idea of political theory as social criticism raises distinct issues, because it involves the practical context-dependent relationship of political theory to political action. This aspect of alienation might better be conceived as distancing, since academic political theory is distanced from politics virtually by definition. The complexities of this issue are seldom confronted. Despite many pleas for a more involved political theory, what this means in this society at this time remains vague. The real question is the role of academic criticism through education, journals of opinion, and other possible avenues. I can see no easy response to the complexities involved. The best that can be expected is candid address of the issues involved in the relationship between public and academic discourse—unclouded by images from the myth of the tradition, critical theory, the literature of public policy, or other sources that both distort the problem and prejudice the answer.

IX

Reid pursues, probably more directly and vigorously than anyone else, what many seem to take as conservative reservations on my part about developing a critical political theory. I will respond to his essay by continuing to address this issue. I do so at some risk of an injustice to Reid: some of the problems that I find with his *idea* of critical political theory may likely not reflect his actual endeavors, and I am addressing here much that equally deserves to be allocated to other sections of my response.

Reid quite correctly notes my change of direction away from “phenomenology, Marxism, and even existentialism,” but this move is not best described as either a “detour” or the result of my having “lost track” of this material. As indicated earlier, I eventually found few theoretical resources in such work which has been used by political theorists mostly to contribute to their propensity for metatheory. It is a mighty extrapolation, however, to conclude from this that “neither ontological nor political radicalism interest [me] much.” It would be more accurate to say that I see in this material limited grounds for either form of radicalism. I have already explained reasons for believing that action theory, particularly of the nonmentalist variety that I have attempted to develop, is ontologically (or theoretically) radical and that, at least hypothetically, it gives significant

purchase for political radicalism. But the whole issue of political theory and political radicalism requires more discussion.

There may be pointed exceptions; but, on the whole, the radicalism of political theory in the American university is now distinctly academic—in both senses of that term. This is due in part to some definite historical factors internal to the evolution of the social sciences in the United States. There is a great distance between the radical activist origins of social science in America (during the twenty years from 1865 to 1885) and contemporary claims about radical social science and critical political theory. What has intervened is academic professionalism. Radical or critical political theory is an idea, largely something that is talked about rather than practiced. It is an academic fantasy and a faint memory which long ago severed any real connection with the objects in their concern. Only a strange academic pretension produces the notion that finding the right philosophical grounding can make academic political theory into something more than it is. Only another pretension implies that depth of concern or other emotive attributes can make this academic practice, as either scholarly production or classroom education, a form of political action or some equivalent to it.

Secured (or imprisoned) within structures of the university and profession, self-ascribed academic radicals posture like actors on a stage. They only descend into the audience within the limits of certain *avante-garde* productions that would never, in the end, endanger their status as actors or propel the audience beyond the role of spectators. But even the audience consists primarily of other actors. Caught up in this academic theater, they come to believe after a while that the play is the most real thing, that acting is a more noble and efficacious endeavor than the actual practices of life, and that its purity must be maintained. In large measure, of course, this is rhetoric, but not the rhetoric of the street. Political myth is one thing, but mythical politics is another.

While these actors have visions of the world which they wish to reproduce, they have long since lost touch with the concrete character of society, and their world is the product of a script written by others. Maybe the greatest irony is that, while their performances are dedicated to changing the world, they seldom address the specific world in which they reside. They are content to play in a theater whose management and financing is microcosm of the world which they wish to transform, but their vision is too prodigious to be directed toward such small objects. They may complain in passing about the way the players are hired and fired and about the lack of democracy in the company, but they are on the road too frequently to get involved deeply. And, after all, it is their sinecure as permanent

members of the troupe that allows them to display their grand gestures without fear of contamination or reprisal.

There are some, usually the more conservative players, who also think that society is a seamless web and that theater changes the world, and they become upset at stage histrionics which mock and criticize life. But much paranoia is surpassed only by the blind faith of those who believe that their performances transform the lives of those with whom they come into contact and that the theater is surely so much a part of life that any real distinction is forced and analytic. It is difficult to know how many have a real passion for the life which they represent on stage or the extent to which their drama is a surrogate for what the world denies them or what they have denied themselves. Probably, many are just actors with feigned and rehearsed concern which they have acquired from their masters and coaches. For them, the play is the thing. For a few, however, these scenes are a vehicle for higher purpose. Sadly, society reserves the theater for their activity, putting them safely away where anything can be said, because everyone knows that it is just a play. Society knows that, in the end, the demands of the profession will keep most from mixing their art with life. Of the few who escape to seek recognition outside the theater, it is safe to assume that they are too inexperienced in the ways of the world to manipulate it and that the worst oppression is simply to ignore them.

This fable is merely a way of making a long story short. But I do want to make it as clear as possible that the apoliticalness and conservatism ascribed to me is charged against a background of alienated and philosophical radicalism that seldom talks about actual practices, let alone to them. My concern with the open society, which Reid takes to reflect attachment to liberal ideology, simply comes from the observation that such a society effectively defuses radicalism. It does so particularly by reserving the university for radical talk, deprived or at least flattened of potential significance through pure tolerance. Reid wishes to pose the question of "the theorist's public responsibility," and this question should be posed. But my brief comments about the open society are less a way of legitimating the abdication of that responsibility than a way of indicating how it cannot be fulfilled in terms of alienated political theory. To couch diagnosis and prescription in this language is to continue to ensure impotence—both because it has no audience and because it obscures the world as much as the conceptual schemes of orthodox social science. It merely substitutes one reified structure for another.

As Reid and others are quick to point out, in my capacity as an academic political theorist, I have seldom written about politics. But I doubt that the field includes any significant body of writing about politics in a manner that differs substantially from the way philosophers could be said

to write about science or, at least, literary critics could be said to write about literature. Political theory often thinks it does something more, but exactly what or how is never made very clear. For the moment, I am content to write critically about the practices of knowledge that claim to speak of and to politics and about their actual relationship to that world—on the assumption that at least I am writing about actual practices, however insignificant they may be.

I might want to debate Reid's claim that I do not give "sustained attention" to the historical context of American political culture and the liberal ideology of American social science. But the ideas that my remarks about the open society function as "an intellectual alibi for the failure to come to grips with the ideological and historical dynamics of advanced capitalist society" and that my notion of the givenness of social phenomena constitutes an endorsement of that society are as far off the mark as anything that I can conceive. And I welcome the opportunity to reject attribution of such a posture.

What separates the practice of political theory and the practice of politics is a very complicated matter that cannot be answered without exploring in detail the present and past of social science and the place of the university in society. Clearly, however, one thing that stands between the language of political theory and its putative object is precisely shopworn transcendentalism and epistemology. These mask both the general character of political reality and its particular instantiations. But philosophically-constituted worlds are so much easier than reality to penetrate and manipulate that they always tempt the attention of intellectuals. There may be contexts of real political import for the philosophical rhetoric of neo-Marxism and the politically philosophized versions of phenomenology, but in American political culture, within the American University, in our times, these have become largely forms of intellectual narcissism.

As Arendt suggested, political theory might engage politics best by speaking those small, simple, factual truths that people either do not know or do not want to hear. But political theory as muckraking does not appeal much to the academic world for at least two reasons. First, it is not dramatic enough for the world-historical aspirations of most political theory and its real love—metaphysics. Second, this is the one kind of claim that might bring political reprisal and create discomfort within the university. To these reasons might be added the fact that this would mean some distasteful contact with real political practices—rather than antiseptic images of such practices in which the problems and answers are available in advance.

Reid argues that political theorists should concern themselves with the world of living history, and I agree. But that world is not accessible in alienated philosophy or the doubly alienated political theory which would

encounter the world in such terms. The "real world" offered by critical theory as an object is a world constituted by others, in terms as remote from the particularities of politics and questions about the ontology of politics as epistemology is from science or moral philosophy is from morality. The alienation is so great that critical theorists come to view the distance between theory and practice as an intellectual problem. Reid, for example, attributes it to "impoverished notions of temporality and historicity" and a failure to understand "the dialectics of totality and temporality." How easy life would be, if the problem were simply a matter of philosophy and not action!

Beyond these specific dimensions of alienation is the fact that, no matter how Marxist, materialist, or structuralist political theory may be, it is consumed by a faith in the efficacy, purity, and sanctity of thought, thinking, theory, and mind which legitimates the precious and unworldly radicalism of academic intellectuals. If political theory as an academic activity is failing to do something that it should do, the problem may be—as Reid suggests—a failure of nerve. But I doubt that it is a failure of "intellectual nerve." Political theorists are strong on *intellectual* nerve. There is much *praxis* but very little practice. Critical political theory will remain irrelevant as long as it is only a theory of theory and retains a faith in the power of academic thought which neglects the concrete contexts of such thought, cloaking itself in philosophy and alleged access to truths beyond critical scrutiny.

X

I hoped that Moon would address in a more specific manner my criticisms of metatheory and political inquiry, particularly of the arguments he has made in this regard. On several occasions,²¹ I have argued that Moon conflates actual forms of political inquiry and philosophical claims about explanation in social science, describes substantive differences between modes of inquiry in terms of philosophical distinctions, and offers solutions to conflicts between such modes that are mostly a synthesis of philosophical and methodological arguments. These exemplify what I mean by the alienation of political theory, and I am eager to join the issue directly. As Moon indicates, I discuss the ways metatheoretical claims such as those associated with epistemology are used to justify forms of inquiry. Further, I have made the more extended and hypothetical argument that, before epistemology and methodology become independent endeavors of philosophy, they served to legitimate scientific theories in the face of traditional authority and rival claims. They continue to play this role in social science,

as in the relationship between positivism and behavioralism, and I have tried to show how misunderstanding the relationship, and believing that inquiry is grounded in metatheory, has contributed to the alienation of political theory on a number of fronts.

In discussing my claims regarding the legitimating uses of metatheory, Moon translates "uses" as "reasons." Yet such reasons, in something other than a rhetorical sense, are precisely what epistemology cannot provide. The problem is not metatheory and epistemology in some generic sense of reflection or self-consciousness, which could hardly be faulted. It is rather arguments, such as Moon's, that identify philosophical claims about explanation with approaches to inquiry or even theories of politics. Only confusing some generic notion of metatheory with such moves and with specific claims in metatheory would lead Moon to find irony in the fact that I engage in metatheoretical critique. My criticisms of the discipline of political science are not, and are not based on, abstract philosophical claims. They are directed toward current programs of research.

Moon argues that my critique of instrumentalism in behavioral political science fails to demonstrate its actual inhibition of political inquiry. He suggests that it may, in fact, have "stimulated" inquiry. I argue that the instrumentalist theories of theory, characteristic of logical positivism and empiricism, have been used by political science as legitimations of forms of inquiry and as practical guides to theory construction. I question the validity of the first move in several respects, but I am especially disturbed by the second. It directs attention away from substantive theory and distorts the relationship between science and the philosophy of science. Instrumentalism has stimulated social science, but I doubt that it has done so in a healthy manner. As Moon suggests, instrumentalism may have been conducive to the development of rational-choice theory and the kind of program advocated by William Riker. This is not only a poor defense of instrumentalism but, in my view, by implication, a clear condemnation of it. Rational-choice approaches are about as theoretically empty as anything I can think of in political science, and they display fully the characteristics of metathetical legitimation and theoretical distortion of which I have been most critical.

Rational-choice models are heavily influenced by philosophical notions of theoretical instrumentalism which are neither explicated nor defended. Their proponents consistently make a degenerative set of moves. They enter some general claim about the unity of science. Then they identify science, often abstractly, with a philosophical model derived from logical-empiricist philosophy of science. Next, they characterize theory in instrumentalist terms. And finally, they equate their particular research program with these features, claiming that it represents, embodies, or simply is

natural science. These moves are neither defended individually nor articulated logically. Although these problems were thoroughly exposed and discussed in the mid-1970s, they have been visited upon us again with renewed vigor in the name of so-called positive political theory. Furthermore, they imply the same ideological motifs as early behavioralism by validating notions of elitist democracy and interest-group liberalism as the real meaning of democratic politics.

Moon claims that political science employs several modes of explanation. Perhaps so, but when these are immediately taken as—or tied to—meta-theoretical images of explanation, and when conflicts among them are treated as occasions for philosophical synthesis, there is very little chance of substantive confrontation between theories. Moreover, when instrumentalism becomes a justification for theoretical pluralism, there is real danger of returning to the devaluation of theory that characterized the apotheosis of conceptual frameworks in the 1960s and destroyed the possibility of theoretical agreement. What theories imply for the practice of inquiry is an important question, but the first problem is to retire the myth that theories are simply approaches to—or philosophical claims about—explanation.

XI

I am inclined to approach the essays by Nelson and Strauber as a unit for several reasons. First, they seem on the whole to understand me at least as well as I understand myself, and they devote themselves to careful analysis of my arguments. Second, they take account of relationships among different facets of the incipient unity of my arguments, as well as faithfully describing them. Third, I agree or sympathize with many of their own views developed here. And fourth, their criticisms have definite themes in common which also reflect criticism advanced in the previous essays.

They claim that, in my arguments about the theory of action, I fall back into a subtle (or maybe not so subtle) stance of positivism. This appears in my insistence on the facticity of conventions and the separation of action designations from descriptions, evaluations, and other kinds of claims about them. Furthermore, while I seem to reject philosophy, I sneak it back in under the guise of action theory. I may implicitly, they suggest, even hang on to the idea of natural science as a model of inquiry. All this exemplifies my tendency to reconstitute most of the myths that I profess to destroy and my failure to get outside of the very kind of metatheory that I devalue. Finally, despite my concern with the alienation of political theory, I do not offer much to repair it. At least by implication, I back

political theory into a relativism—if not nihilism—that gives it no purchase for criticism or social action. At the same time, I so compartmentalize political theory, philosophy, and politics that I not only fail to see, but tend to inhibit, their relationship.

Although I at least begin to address these issues in my replies to the other critics, my answers can stand further development. Rather than sorting all the specifics and responding *seriatim*, I attempt a general response, beginning with the issue of relativism.

This is very much like an issue raised by Kuhn's work; and in both cases, the answer is in some respects straightforward. In effect, Kuhn and I both argue that there are no given grounds for academic philosophy to arbitrate among substantive claims in science, morals, politics, or elsewhere. In various descriptive, evaluative, and explanatory senses, it can make its own claims about these domains, and it could conceivably even seek to enter substantive disputes on their own terms. In principle, the possibilities are infinite. But the fact that philosophy has no special access to the foundations of knowledge in science or morals, in no way makes science and morals relativistic or destroys standards of objectivity. Logically, philosophy has nothing to do with truth claims in such a practice. The dilemma of relativism or nihilism and the search for foundations are largely philosophical problems that are abstracted from the world of substantive disputes and judgments. These problems arise when we realize that philosophy is not what we thought it was yet continue to expect it to serve as we thought it would.

Time and again in print, at professional conferences, and other forms, we hear the refrain: yes, arguments like Kuhn's are important, but they leave science without any basis of objectivity—as if Kuhn could give or take it away in the first place! To be sure, there remain issues of practical effect. Conceivably, an anthropologist might subvert some alien society of little faith. But only philosophical hubris leads to the idea that philosophy is the foundation of science or a kind of master-science. The same structural relationship holds for metatheory and political inquiry and for political theory and politics. Political scientists feel a need for philosophical grounds, and political theorists believe that they must either underwrite politics or find some transcendental ground for criticisms of it. But the search for such ground is often an excuse for not facing the realities of the relationship.

Strauber suggests that my vision is one of political theory in a world without criteria. This is correct in the sense that I deny political theory authoritative transcendental grounds of judgment, but the exact opposite might be closer to the case. The world, the real world, abounds with criteria. The problem is not their dearth but their superfluity. If there is a dilemma, it is seldom one of practice but of the realization that academic

political theory has absolutely no incorrigible basis for solving its own disputes, let alone those of others. The urge to provide criteria for others may not be surprising, particularly on the part of a political theory with concerns rooted in practical problems. But the dilemma of relativism is only the mirror image of foundationalism. The desire for final solutions and fixed ideals is only the reflection of an encounter with worlds such as politics and morals, which are largely defined by the fact that criteria are consistently in dispute.

Some may look back—incorrectly, I think—on the history of political theory as attempts to provide foundations for political judgments. Some may even declare them successful. This merits the reply of Hobbes to revelation: the age of miracles is over. No one can claim special, transcendental authority merely by virtue of putative philosophical access to the meaning of life. Nelson and Strauber might want to argue for the practical or rhetorical virtues of such claims. I have no general problem with this, but I have specific doubts of their efficacy and even greater doubts of the virtue and virtuosity of those who would see themselves as wielding these philosophical weapons. The implications are usually obscurantist and undemocratic, even when the battle is supposedly waged for democratic values. If academic political theorists want a field of action, they might—as I suggested earlier—begin with the university. But to target the significant institution of the university for criticism, except in abstract and totally safe ways, would endanger the position that makes it possible for political theory to say so much and yet so little. The defining task of academic political theory can be neither to underwrite nor to undermine politics, no matter how much in some instances and in some ways it may contribute to both. However we feel about classic political theory, it is not the same as political theory in contemporary universities, no matter how much priests of the historical oracle identify the two. Only if we shake off such institutionalized bad faith can we confront the issues of political theory and politics in a realistic manner.

Despite what Strauber says, I hesitate to say that action theory (as I call it for want of a better name) is “scientific” theory. Action theory is functionally equivalent to what I would specify as the theoretical dimension of natural science, once that is extricated from philosophical images of theory. If I cling to the paradigm of natural science as a standard, this is only because it is a good example of determinate practices of inquiry. Action theory, or my argument under that rubric, is only a claim about one dimension of the object of social inquiry: toward what sort of stuff a portion of inquiry is directed. Critical Theory, interpretive theory, empirical theory, and the like make claims about the role of theory or social science and the nature of inquiry without concerning themselves centrally with

the class of phenomena in question. By contrast, action theory makes detailed claims about that class.

Such a theory may have all sorts of implications for inquiry, but these cannot be simply read off from it. It may implicitly negate some forms of inquiry and suggests others, but the key point is that it constitutes a domain of facticity. When explicated, such a theory is incommensurable with those of sociobiology, psychoanalysis, behaviorism, theism, Marxism, and other general ontologies of politics and history. Action theory is a set of claims about the kind of thing toward which social inquiry is directed. These ontological claims must underlie any sort of "regional" explications of such phenomena (*i.e.*, texts, political speech, etc.), either in the sense of being embedded in them or elaborated as separate theoretical arguments.

Action theory is not an academic field but a set of claims, wherever they may appear. Most have appeared in the literature of philosophy, but calling on this material does not mean a return to the very metatheory that I have rejected. Action theory is not epistemology, methodology, or any other aspect of alienated philosophy that I have taken pains to distinguish and criticize. By making arguments about the existence and character of the basic class of facts that I call actions or conventional behavior, critics sometimes claim that I am returning to the positivist myth of the given. But that was a metatheoretical claim about a universal class of facts—observable, phenomenal, physical, etc.—which supposedly was philosophically specifiable and stood outside and above any particular substantive theoretical claim. Saying that the class of facts posited by action theory is like the myth of the given is like saying that any natural scientist who attaches truth-value to a theoretical claim about the existence and character of elements populating a specific domain of facts is therefore a positivist.

Another—but similar—misunderstanding that has arisen involves my claim that facts of the universe of action are preconstituted. I make this claim, however, within the context of the theory. It is a claim about what kind of facts they are and not a claim about their epistemological priority, accessibility to immediate experience, etc. It is part of an explication of the conventional character of action facts. This claim is no more outside the realm of criticism than is any substantive claim about the world. Finally, I have argued that the designation of an action must be distinguished from any description, evaluation, or other statement about it, but this is another feature of the theory that has nothing to do with such distinctions as the positivist dichotomies between theory and fact or between fact and value which were universal, categorical claims of philosophy. There is a fundamental difference between epistemology and theory. The failure to see this is what allows my rejection of epistemology to sound relativistic and my claims about action to sound epistemological.

The facts posited within action theory adjudicate only for claims within action theory. No more than any other theory's claims can they arbitrate between theories. Nor does this notion of action justify some particular claim about politics such as that which occurs in the work of Arendt and Habermas. It does, however, carry implications for thinking about politics. One such implication is that there can be no autonomous theory of politics, because politics is only a historical form of conventional action and has no independent theoretical ground. The theory can potentially provide critical leverage, but although many theorists want such leverage in one sense, they really seek a basis for the affirmation of a particular political or philosophical ideology. Critical concern often masks a quest for certainty, and action theory has no obvious answers to that quest.

This brings us back to the relationship between academic political theory and politics, especially to the inadequacy of most categories for discussing it. Categorical claims about theory and practice tend to carry with them presuppositions derived from particular criteria of application, and when projected on other circumstances, they mythologize the relationship. As Nelson says, I do want to destroy a number of myths in order to make political theory more authentic and unalienated, but he is equally correct to suggest that none of these myths—of theory, politics, the tradition, or the given—are merely chimeras. Instead, they are abstractions and reifications. The myth of the tradition builds on the reality of actual traditions of thought and action; the myth of the given derives from domains of facticity constituted by theories in the practices of knowledge; the myth of politics issues from the existence and persistence of political forms; and the myth of theory is a reflection of real aspects of science and politics. Hence I do not reject all that they represent but only their unwarranted extrapolations and uses. Children do have attachments to their parents, but this does not validate the existence of the Oedipus complex.

XII

Since my earlier, extended, and more technical reply to Pocock's comments is available elsewhere, and I have published a detailed criticism and discussion of the related arguments of Quentin Skinner,²² I will address only a few points here. Surely the main problem is Pocock's perplexity over my simultaneous rejection of the myth of the tradition and his call for the application of a more rigorous historical method. How can I distance myself from both notions of historicity at the same time? This leads him to suggest that I am confused and confusing, but he has a much too dichotomous view of the world. My problem with the "new history" is

less with its substantive work than with its methodological definition and legitimation, which tends to obscure the project and some problems inherent in it. My basic point is quite simple. I do not want to see the myth of the tradition replaced by the myth of method. The notion of method advanced by Pocock provides no firmer ground for the history of political theory as a field of study than did the myth of the tradition, and it is necessary to cut through the rhetoric of both to achieve a clear sense of the enterprise.

One problem with this work reminds me of the dilemma of post-Marxian sociology. It investigates a demystified universe that nevertheless has been constituted in both form and content by the very vision rejected. This is why Skinner's history of political theory looks much like a sophisticated version of Sabine's. The new history may attend more to interstitial authors and a plurality of traditions; it may embrace a vaguer and more modest notion of practical relevance; and it may insist on the priority of historical over philosophical concerns. On the whole, however, it merely shifts emphasis in order to maintain a field of study from which the formative rationale has been extracted. Only now, the project is cloaked in methodology drawn from recent philosophy of social science. More specifically, it is largely a philosophy of the explanation of human action which serves to validate a neo-Collingwood approach to the history of political ideas.

Once beyond the methodological Maginot Line, there are many small problems. First, this material is fertile ground for ideology hunters, despite all the claims about eschewing philosophy and political bias. Second, there has been little sustained and detailed analysis of texts, notwithstanding all the discussion of recovering textual meaning. The primary product is standard intellectual history of the contextualist-idealist variety. Third, the small and most modest traditions seem little more endowed with historicity than the great tradition, although they claim to be real history. But, from my perspective in this context, the basic problem with this work revolves less around regional issues than around how much it manifests characteristics associated with the alienation of political theory.

The method here is principally, and literally, a methodology: a metatheoretical claim about historical understanding. Extended discussion of whether or how to apply it is fruitless. Basically, it serves as an apology for some historical practices and a basis for criticizing others, and it often obscures the actual character of both. Individuals such as Skinner see problems with the old history of political theory. Somewhat ironically, though, they pay little attention to its historical context and the actual intentions of its work. Moreover, a match between the theory and practice of the new history is hard to find. But what is most obscured is its lack

of an explicit theoretical basis for its historical practice. It may hint about a theory of texts and human action, but it explicitly provides only variations on philosophical arguments about the explanation of action. Largely, these seem devised to justify an approach to history that earlier received severe criticism and to enable criticism of structuralist and Marxist approaches.

Pocock is incorrect to see me, in any general or unqualified sense, as a partisan of Gadamer. But two things are significant about this identification. First, Pocock takes Gadamer's arguments as claims about how to approach textual interpretation. This designation is wrong in view of both what Gadamer says he is doing and in terms of the genre to which his work belongs. It is better understood as a philosophical argument about the nature of human understanding and what necessarily takes place in a hermeneutical encounter. Second, I introduce Gadamer's arguments not because they show how to practice the history of political theory but because they help to locate Pocock's arguments about method in the proper universe of discourse and demonstrate that there are other philosophical notions of historicity. Pocock's account is no more simply identical to the practice of history than logical positivism is automatically identical to the practice of science.

My main concern in this respect, however, is to demonstrate the difference between a theory of the text and a philosophy of textual interpretation, between a theory of action and a metatheoretical analysis of the explanation of action. When Pocock and Skinner actually do make theoretical claims, they do so to bolster a metatheory, which in turn is employed to legitimate a particular form of historical practice and is advanced as a method. At best, this muddles the situation. As I attempted to explain in the book, practical and philosophical hermeneutics must be distinguished in order to understand their relationship. The latter is parasitic on the former. The real issues in the study of the history of political theory are about its purpose, methods, theoretical assumptions, relationship to politics place in political science, and the like. These become alienated when translated into metatheoretical debate about the nature of historicity.

The model of political theory in the last chapter is, as I have already stressed, only an ideal typification. It is constructed analytically from what I take to be similarities in textual and thematic content as well as the circumstances of production of some classic texts. It is offered as little more than a pedagogical approach that is sensitive to historical contexts but primarily designed to provide a basis for an internal interpretation of these texts. The chapter itself neither elaborates its claims of historical resemblance nor offers detailed interpretations. Instead, it provides an alternate model and approach to those embodied in the myth of the tradition and the new

history. While some might see it as entailing elements of both, it is in no respect meant to synthesize the two.

Pocock's suggestion that my model is indistinguishable from the myth of the tradition strikes me as strange. I see no significant similarities to basic characteristics of that myth. Pocock's claim that I reconstitute the tradition without the idea that it is a tradition comes close to conceding the major difference, but my arguments go much further. My model has nothing to do with the historical evolution of political thought and politics. This does not imply any general quarrel with studies of historical change or interests in historical contexts, but my concern is textual interpretation. While Pocock paints me as a Gadamerian, ready to play fast and loose with history and meaning, Kateb and others portray me as imprisoning the texts in the contexts of their own times. Offending both parties suggests that my own position is independent.

Much of political theory, including historical studies, is caught up in the alienating activity of attempting to resolve practical problems—of politics, political inquiry, and their relationship—in terms of metatheory or philosophy. This activity intrudes into the practices and distorts them. Pocock appears to recognize this problem in his limited discussion of the tension between theorists and historians. But, finally, let me caution against a misperception in this regard. When I urge that we put theory over method, I am not—contrary to Pocock's suggestion—recommending that we deprecate historical inquiry in favor of some old or new mode of using the classic texts for philosophical or rhetorical purposes. My emphasis on theory represents my claim about the primacy of ontology of thought, language, and action—and a recognition that methods are derivative and methodologies are parasitic. It is hardly a renewed plea for an academic practice of political theory on some alienated transhistorical level.

XIII

After saying much about what is wrong with political theory, perhaps I could—or should—offer concrete recommendations about change. I lack a grand alternative, of the kind that political theorists find attractive, and most of my specific suggestions for political theory have already been presented. Nevertheless, I would add a few points about positive directions.

I have no quarrel with metatheory as simply reflective third-order discourse, and I endorse an empirical and critical epistemology that would examine in detail the actual practices of knowledge, in both their past and present forms. It would study the criteria for advancing various kinds of claims and would investigate the theoretical construction of the worlds

constituted by these practices. It would also permit critical postures to grow from a theory of human action rather than be built on the basis of exhausted forms of transcendentalism. This is precisely how I understand the character of my own activity in explaining and criticizing academic political theory as a field of study, and I see it as belonging to the same genre of internal critique that has revolutionized the philosophy of science in recent years. This also represents my basic model for social-scientific inquiry and the reconstitution of political theory, that is, the general role of second-order discourse in relation to first-order discourse and the conventional practices of life such as politics. But this somewhat schematic or logical analysis of the structural relationship between metatheory, political theory, and politics is hardly sufficient. More difficult by far are pragmatic issues about these relationships.

These issues are seldom open to quick and general answers which avoid past mistakes and take adequate account of specific circumstances. They prompt all sorts of general maxims that few people would dare deny. Social science and political theory, it is said, should seek human emancipation, ideal communication, authentic relationships, and democracy. It should avoid serving, or apologizing for, the activities that it studies. It should undertake ruthless criticism of all things. It should expose surplus repression, reject domination, defend the autonomy of individuals, and so on. But most of this is empty moralizing that systematically ignores the particularities of actual practices of politics and the contexts of academic activities that study it.

Professional academic political theory has existed for approximately a century. During that time, it has cast up many extravagant images of itself and its relationship to politics, but one would be hard-pressed to point to much in the way of accomplishments regarding political involvement let alone political change. It is interesting that this career—both temporally and in quality—parallels almost exactly that of the philosophy of science. Despite all its claims about what science is and should be, there is little to suggest that such philosophy either produced much understanding of the practice of science or contributed to the improvement of that practice. Some may feel that more recent work in the philosophy of science is too reticent and relativistic; but at least it has helped clear the field of cognitive and practical pretensions that threatened to disable it, and it has given us better access to an understanding of the practice of science. I hope for as much in terms of political theory and its study of politics.

No longer is it possible, I think, for political theorists to address politics with claims to authority of knowledge after the fashion of traditional transcendentalism and epistemology. In a peculiar way, this is bound to change the nature of political theorizing. The exact nature of change is

difficult to predict. This could produce a more engaged and practically oriented political theory, or it could generate an increasingly esoteric field. But political theory as an arrogant proclamation of philosophical truth about politics and how to conduct it is not credible. No matter how long it persists in the inertial conventions of academia, political theory as legitimized by the myths of tradition, epistemological givenness, transcendental politics, and world-historical theory is a dead duck. Each of these myths is rooted in habit, convention, and self-interest; but in their eventual demise, we can discern the power of criticism. The open question of what political theory should be now or what unalienated political theory would look like is always interesting but maybe not very rewarding. As Marx indicated long ago, the issue is not so much one of trying to define and predict the historical form that postalienated life might take as it is one of achieving the conditions of its existence.

Notes

1. BPP. Also see ISPO; PTES; ETK; PTTA. All publications cited are my own, since the notes are meant only to link parts of this reply to my previous work.
2. PPMT; MT; PT.
3. PPhT.
4. TCD.
5. SSPR.
6. ICF; DESSI; SPS.
7. PICA.
8. PSPI; PPS.
9. PhPT; PSTA; PSPT.
10. MT; PT.
11. PhPT; MMST; IHPT.
12. ETK.
13. ETK; PTTA.
14. ISPO.
15. PoPT.
16. PT.
17. PPhT.

18. ISPO; PTTA; BPP, chapter 6.
19. BPP.
20. BPP.
21. PPS.
22. MMST; IHPT.

INDEX

- academism, 1-7, 13, 15, 44, 46, 47, 51, 54, 56, 58, 76, 78, 80, 146, 147, 152, 155, 160, 204, 205, 207, 208, 212, 222, 225, 242, 264, 272, 275, 286, 294, 346, 351, 353, 354, 357, 358, 359, 364, 365
- action, 7, 9, 48, 84, 174, 175, 176, 179, 182, 191, 192, 202, 206, 224, 231, 233, 248, 249, 252, 257, 265-67, 269-71, 297, 299, 300, 329, 341, 344, 347, 348, 350, 359, 360, 363
- action, description of instrumental, interpretive, multiplicitous, 297
- action, designation of, 298, 299
- action, designation of multiplicitous, 299
- action, designations of ontological, positive, single, 297
- action, political, 307
- action, symbolic, 172
- action theory, 174-76, 220-22, 261, 263-69, 272-75, 278n, 296, 298, 301, 327, 347, 348, 350, 356, 358-60
- Adorno, Theodor, 227, 230
- alienation, 2, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 13, 15, 16, 18, 171, 202, 220, 225, 227, 229, 242, 259, 281, 301, 306, 308, 326, 327, 328, 330, 332, 335, 341, 344, 349, 350, 352, 353, 354, 359, 363
- Althusser, Louis, 142n, 210
- Aquinas, Thomas, 1, 63, 86
- Arendt, Hannah, 14, 23, 24, 25, 27, 28, 36, 48, 52, 60, 69, 76, 148, 164, 166n, 168n, 199n, 205, 210, 211, 216n, 221, 236n, 288, 289, 306, 321, 326, 330, 335, 338, 343, 360
- Aristotle, 1, 36, 60, 63, 82, 83, 84, 86, 130, 146, 148, 159, 259, 288, 312, 339
- Ashcraft, Richard, 225
- Augustine, 1, 62
- Austin, J. L., 13, 165, 265, 268, 278n, 296, 297, 299
- Bacon, Francis, 74
- Banfield, Edward, 251
- Barker, Ernest, 25
- Beer, Samuel, 251
- behavioralism, 10, 12, 16, 22, 25, 43, 45, 46, 55, 62, 164, 250, 301, 321, 323, 325, 333, 339, 342, 356, 359
- behaviorism, 250
- Benhbib, Seyla, 186
- Benjamin, Walter, 202
- Benn, S.I., 153
- Bentham, Jeremy, 126
- Bentley, Arthur, 59
- Bloom, Allan, 96
- Bloom, Harold, 214n
- Branch, Taylor, 205, 206, 214n
- Brecht, Bertolt, 343
- Burke, Edmund, 28, 228
- Calvin, John, 60
- Camus, Albert, 197n
- Cassirer, Ernst, 10
- Cavell, Stanley, 291
- Certeau, Michel de, 231
- Chevalier, Haakon, 15
- Christ, Jesus, 198n, 283
- Christianity, 89
- Cicero, 1, 140
- classics, 340, 341, 342, 343, 347
- Cobb, Edith, 230
- Coleridge, Samuel Taylor, 129
- collectivity, 52
- communication, 183-85, 308, 364
- communicative ethics, 117
- communism, 74
- community, 4, 53, 58, 115, 204, 229, 243, 244, 247, 311, 341

- Comte, Auguste, 302
 Connolly, William, 153
 conservatism, 269, 331, 332, 348, 352
 contextualism, 226, 282, 296, 361
 contextualists, 83, 157
 covering-law, 250, 251
 Crick, Bernard, 25
 crisis, 71, 74, 75, 339
 Crisis Theory, 305
 critical theory, 190, 209, 227, 350, 351, 358
 criticism, 92, 93, 94, 95, 96, 98
 Cromwell, Oliver, 63, 338
 Culler, Jonathan, 214n
- Dahl, Robert, 251, 253n
 Dallmayr, Fred, 223
 Daly, Mary, 187, 193
 Davidson, Donald, 299
 deconstruction, 17, 39, 136, 142n, 205-07, 209, 211, 214n, 220, 282-310, 312, 313, 315n, 328, 342
 Delany, Samule, 290, 315n
 De Man, Paul, 135, 136, 137, 214n, 288, 290, 315n
 democracy, 3, 5, 6, 18, 75, 116, 119, 120, 202, 203, 338
 Derrida, Jacques, 135, 136, 137, 139, 206, 284, 294, 305
 Descartes, Rene, 11
 dialectic, 290, 291
 Dilthey Wilhelm, 323
 distanciation, 350
 Domarchi, Jean, 234
 Donoghue, Denis, 209
 Dugger, Ronnie, 203
 Dunn, John, 24, 29, 30, 31, 32, 121, 149, 209
 Dunning, William A., 22, 57, 70, 262, 306
- Easton, David, 22, 24, 25, 26, 29, 154, 345, 346
 Eberstein, William, 163
 economics, 243
 Eiron, 15, 16, 18
 Elias, Norbert, 252
 Eliot, T.S., 194
 emotivism, 10, 164
 Engels, Ernst, 192
- epic theory, 213n
 epistemologies, mythical, political, rhetorical, 308
 epistemology, 327, 330, 344, 345, 347, 348
 essentialism, 307
 ethics, 3344
 existentialism, 217, 218, 350
- Facism, 339
 Farabi, Al-, 82, 83, 86, 88, 89
 Figgis, J. N., 25
 Flathman, Richard E., 342, 343, 344, 345, 346, 347
 Foner, Eric, 12
 Forbes, Duncan, 25
 Foucault, Michel, 31, 154, 155, 160, 161, 168n, 209, 210, 229, 284, 305, 345, 346
 foundationalism, 9, 13, 281, 332, 341, 358
 Frankfurt School, 205, 217, 227
 Freire, Paulo, 186
 Freud, Sigmund, 138, 209, 338
 Freudian psychologies, 207
 Friedman, Milton, 248
 Frye, David, 229
 fusion of horizons, 178
- Gabel, Joseph, 229
 Gadamer, Hans-Georg, 31, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 54, 55, 88, 89, 97, 121, 150, 172, 177, 178, 180, 181, 182, 183, 184, 196n, 199n, 218, 220, 221, 223, 225, 226, 228, 316n, 336, 343, 344, 362, 363
 Gadamerian paradigm, 225
 Galbraith, John Kenneth, 215n
 Galileo, 343
 Gellner, Ernest, 159
 generative themes, 186
 Gettell, Raymond G., 22, 25
 Gierke, Otto, 25
 Goethe, J.W. 38
 Goldman, Alvin, 250, 251
 Goodman, Robert, 229
 Gourevitch, Victor, 77
 Gurvitch, Georges, 232

- Habermas, Jürgen, 51, 116, 117, 151, 153, 154, 172, 177, 180, 181, 182, 183, 184, 185, 191, 197n, 198n, 210, 216n, 234, 305, 326, 330, 335, 344, 348, 360
 Halevi, Thomas, 83
 Hampshire, Stuart, 323
 Hanson, N.R., 323
 Hanson, Russell L., 316n, 347, 348, 348, 349
 Hare, R.M., 153
 Hart, H.L.A., 153
 Hartman, Geoffrey, 214n
 Hayek, Friedrich, 25
 Hegel, G.W.F., 1, 79, 159, 192, 217, 290, 311, 349
 Hegelian analysis, 205
 Heidegger, Martin, 10, 24, 25, 54, 71, 74, 99, 131, 180, 191, 199n, 217, 218, 219, 220, 221, 225, 226, 227, 228, 284, 289, 291, 293, 294, 295, 305, 322, 343
 Helgesen, Sally, 193
 hermeneutics, 77, 89, 92, 97, 98, 100, 125, 179, 180, 181, 183, 184, 188, 189, 231, 252, 362
 hermeneutics, critical, 172, 177
 hero, 259
 heroes, 56, 173
 heroic, 288
 heroic imagination, 274
 heroism, 61, 117, 121, 153, 159, 213n
 Hippodamus, 72
 historicism, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 28, 39, 40, 74, 75, 85, 91, 98, 99, 100, 157, 210, 326, 342
 historicity, 10, 22, 23, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 40, 54, 55, 61, 190, 217, 218, 219, 221, 222, 226, 227, 228, 229, 232, 233, 234, 316n, 338, 354, 361
 historiography, 24, 35, 309, 310
 history of ideas, 30, 361
 Hobbes, Thomas, 1, 27, 36, 37, 40, 51, 60, 63, 71, 73, 74, 79, 81, 84, 85, 87, 96, 108n, 116, 119, 122, 139, 149, 150, 152, 159, 164, 216n, 257, 338, 358
 Homer, 140, 202
 Hooker, Richard, 55
 Horkheimer, Max, 227
 Hume, 207
 Husserl, Edmund, 99, 217, 219, 223, 224, 225, 227, 228, 231
 ideal speech, 189
 Illich, Ivan, 153
 imagination, 120
 instrumentalism, 7, 246, 247, 248, 249, 281, 297, 298, 303, 311, 312, 343, 345, 355, 356
 intentionalist, 343
 intentionality, 344
 interpretation, 54, 55, 70, 71, 77, 78, 88, 89, 92, 93, 94, 95, 96, 97, 98, 119, 121, 126, 127, 172, 174, 178, 179, 180, 183, 206, 211, 226, 278n, 340, 344, 363
 intersubjectivity, 223, 224
 irony, 2, 3, 16, 17, 29, 30, 88, 97, 222, 257, 258, 259, 262, 275, 290, 351
 irony, see also Eiron, 15
 James, Henry, 128
 Jay, Martin, 209
 Johnson, Lyndon B., 204
 Jong, Erica, 200n
 Jung, Carl Gustav, 338
 Kafka, Franz, 171
 Kant, Immanuel, 79
 Kaplan, Morton, 254n
 Kateb, George, 340, 341, 342, 363
 Kendall, Wilmoore, 57
 Kerr, Clark, 18n, 205
 keywords, 186, 187, 188, 189
 Kierkegaard, Søren, 212, 288, 314n
 Kress, Paul F., 349
 Kuhn, Thomas S., 31, 62, 165, 212, 323, 332, 338, 357
 Lakatos, Imre, 248
 language, 25, 31, 135–37, 139, 150, 151, 157–60, 162, 165, 168n, 180–82, 190, 210, 212, 249, 263, 266, 278n, 281, 286, 297, 299, 303, 344, 345, 363
 language-games, 158, 162, 268
 Laslett, Peter, 25, 26, 326
 Lasswell, Harold, 59

- lawgiving, 119, 139
 Lawson, Jack, 188
 Lefebvre, Henri, 222
 Lenin, V. I., 25
 Leninist handbook, 207
 liberalism, 269, 339
 liberation, 176, 177, 187, 192, 193,
 210, 212, 288
 Lindsay, A.D., 251
 Locke, John, 1, 27, 37, 51, 57, 75, 78,
 79, 84, 85, 116, 122, 139, 152,
 159, 326
 Louch, A.R., 252, 263, 323
 Luckmann, Thomas, 223
 Lukacs, Georg, 229, 230
 Luther, Martin, 60, 62

 Machiavelli, Niccolo, 1, 23, 27, 30,
 36-38, 60, 62, 71, 73, 77, 78, 81,
 82, 84, 87, 94, 149, 150, 164, 207,
 257, 339, 343
 McIlwain, Chales H., 25, 57
 MacIntyre, Alasdair, 11, 19n, 153, 190
 Macpherson, C.B., 57
 McWilliams, Wilson Carey, 204
 Maimonides, 77, 82, 83, 86, 93
 Malraux, Andre, 141n
 Mannheim, Karl, 145
 Marcuse, Herbert, 159, 203, 209
 Marsilius, Herbert, 159, 203, 209
 Marx, Karl, 1, 8, 23, 35, 36, 56, 63,
 79, 84, 138, 139, 149, 154, 155,
 159, 161, 173, 176, 183, 192,
 199n, 204, 209, 210, 217, 221,
 257, 258, 275, 288, 302, 345, 346,
 348
 Marx, Werner, 218-220
 Marxism, 47, 79, 157, 208, 209, 210,
 217, 218, 269, 350, 359
 Marxist theory, 247
 McGill, Allan, 314n
 memory, 191, 199n
 Merleau-Ponty, Maurice, 219, 223, 227,
 231, 232, 235
 Merriam, Charles, 22, 29
 metaphysics, 353
 metatheory, 8, 12, 16, 17, 207, 208,
 211, 228, 244, 245, 247, 248, 252,
 262, 275, 281, 282, 287, 292, 293,
 301, 307, 308, 328, 350, 354, 355,
 357, 361, 362, 363
 methodism, 44, 45, 50, 332, 335
 methodology, 336
 Mill, John Stuart, 1, 8, 117, 126, 134,
 135, 137, 138, 341
 Miller, Eugene, 277n
 Miler, H. Hillis, 214n
 modernity, 73, 84, 93, 96, 115
 Momigliano, Arnaldo, 91
 Moon, J. Donald, 354-56
 morality, 341
 More, Thomas, 63, 166n
 Mumford, Lewis, 231
 myth, 220, 330, 331, 332, 333, 334,
 335, 336, 337, 339, 340, 342, 347,
 349, 351
 myth of the given, 296, 299, 300, 306
 myth of theory (theory, see myth of)
 myth of the political, 306, 307
 myth of the tradition (see tradition,
 myth of the)

 Nagel, Ernest, 254n
 Namier, Lewis, 25
 Napoleon, 139, 192
 narrative, 177, 189, 190, 191, 193
 Natanson, Maurice, 224
 natural science, 356, 358
 Nelson, Jonn S., 218, 220-22, 225,
 228, 356, 358, 360
 New Criticism, 34
 Newton, Isaac, 63, 333
 Niebuhr, Reinhold, 257
 Nietzsche, Friedrich, 1, 2, 7, 73-75, 84,
 100, 114, 115, 131, 138, 155,
 167n, 210, 257, 260, 285, 288,
 290, 305, 314n
 nihilism, 284, 331
 Nisbet, Robert, 153, 204
 Nixon, Richard, 229
 nomological model, 249, 250, 251
 normal science, 243, 245
 Norris, Christopher, 214n
 Nozick, Robert, 206

 Oakeshott, Michael, 25, 56, 149,
 154-58, 161, 166n, 167n, 202,
 345, 346
 Oliver, Daniel, 104n

- ontology, 350
- open societies, 153
- open society, 4, 5, 58, 115-17, 132, 221, 222, 260, 269, 273, 274, 276n, 281, 295, 303, 341, 345, 352, 353
- order, 114
- Ordeshook, Peter, 248
- Paci, Enzo, 232
- Paine, Thomas, 127
- Palmer, Richard, 221
- Parsons, Arthur, 224
- Parsons, Talcott, 232
- particularism, 75
- Pascal, Blaise, 147, 148, 343
- Peirce, Charles S., 43
- phenomonology, 99, 157, 205, 217, 222, 224, 225, 296, 350, 353
- philosophy, 11, 12, 13, 15, 90, 91, 92, 98, 99, 100, 121, 130, 147, 148, 149, 151, 154, 155, 156, 157, 158, 160, 162, 202, 242, 267, 281, 302, 325, 326, 327, 330, 331, 339, 341, 341, 343, 344, 345, 345, 346, 347, 349, 354, 356, 357, 357, 359
 - analytical, 8
- philosophy, anlystical, 8, 205, 302
- philosophy, linguistic, 270
- philosophy of science, 329, 337, 344, 348
- Piccone, Paul, 236n
- Pitkin, Hannah, 153
- Plato, 1, 8, 17, 36, 37, 38, 39, 48, 55, 56, 60, 61, 63, 76, 79, 82, 84-86, 88, 89, 93, 96, 97, 99, 110n, 115, 116, 119, 130, 132, 134, 139, 140, 147, 148, 149, 150, 152, 159, 164, 168n, 202, 204, 219, 221, 259, 288, 322, 337, 343
- Platonic model, 221
- pluralism, 4, 5, 212, 244, 333, 334, 341, 356
- Pocock, J.G.A., 10, 24, 25, 29-33, 51, 53, 54, 57, 69, 73, 82, 87, 113, 121, 122, 124, 149, 151-53, 164, 165, 167n, 209, 211, 212, 221, 225, 226, 234, 326, 335, 336, 340, 344, 347, 360, 361, 362, 363
- Polanyi, Michael, 25, 52
- Polsby, Nelson, 253n
- Popper, Karl, 25, 28, 39, 165, 276n
- Portis, Edward B., 207, 208, 209
- positivism, 10, 22, 26, 35, 54, 85, 99, 164, 174, 266, 267, 324, 325, 348, 355, 356
- post behavioralism, 333
- postmodernism, 221
- postpositivism, 155, 158, 165, 324, 325
- power, 53, 74, 75, 210, 222, 330
- power, community, 243
- practice, 7, 8, 9, 11, 12, 16, 84, 86, 119-121, 133, 155, 156, 158, 182, 202, 204, 212, 230, 231, 233, 234, 251, 260, 261, 281, 301, 302, 306, 327, 330, 333, 343, 344, 345, 346-48, 353, 354, 362, 363
- pragmatism, 157
- Proust, Marcel, 195n
- Putnam, Hilary, 301
- Quine, W.V.D., 165
- Quinton, Anthony, 47
- radicalism, 341, 350, 351, 352
- Rank, Otto, 27
- rationalism, 73, 156
- Rawls, John, 51, 116, 151, 153, 154, 168n, 202, 206, 326, 335, 341, 344
- Reagan, Ronald, 53
- reconstruction, 303
- reductionism, 265, 272
- Reid, herbert G., 350, 352, 353, 354
- relativism, 331, 332
- Renault, Mary, 57
- republicanism, 269
- rhetoric, 6, 17, 190, 220, 262, 283, 286, 290, 294, 308, 310, 311, 336, 338, 340, 348, 351, 353, 358, 361, 363
- Rich, Adrienne, 193, 194
- Ricoeur, Paul, 35, 37, 40, 183, 189, 190
- rigidity, 113, 116, 119, 122
- Riker, William, 248, 355
- romanticism, 259
- Rousseau, Jean-Jacques, 1, 60, 73, 79, 82, 84, 137, 139, 159, 164
- Ryle, Gilbert, 278n

- Sabine, George H., 24, 25, 29, 57, 70,
163, 306, 321, 361
- Said, Edward, 209, 210
- Sarachild, Kathie, 197n
- Scanlon, Thomas, 153
- Schaar, John, 59
- Schell, Jonathon, 231
- Schlegel, Friedrich, 286
- Schrag, Calvin O., 230, 231
- Schutz, Alfred, 217, 220-25, 323
- science, 12, 35, 53, 62, 63, 75, 157,
245, 338, 344, 345, 355, 357, 362
- science, philosophy of, 11, 241, 247,
249, 364
- scientism, 10, 333
- Searle, John R., 165, 265, 278n, 296,
297
- Sellars, Wilfrid, 247, 296
- Seneca, 166n
- Shklar, Judith, 32, 153
- Silverberg, Robert, 307, 308
- Simmel, Georg, 211
- Simon, Herbert, 59
- Skinner, Quentin, 10, 24, 25, 29-33,
35, 38, 69, 73, 82, 87, 113,
121-24, 127, 136, 140n, 149, 151,
153, 209, 326, 336, 340, 360, 361,
362
- socialism, 269
- sociology, 233, 259, 261
- Socrates, 8, 17, 72, 86, 89, 138, 166n,
257, 288, 339
- Sophists, 288
- Sophocles, 153
- speech act, 31, 33, 122, 123, 136, 165,
264
- Spinoza, Baruch, 82, 94, 96, 142n
- Steiner, George, 1
- Steintrager, James, 104n
- Stoppard, Tom, 298
- Strauber, Ira, 10, 174, 221, 222, 307,
317n, 356, 357, 358
- Strauss, Leo, 14, 23, 24, 25, 28, 36,
37, 39, 48, 59, 60, 69, 70-78, 82,
85-100, 103n, 130, 132, 134,
142n, 164, 166n, 168n, 211, 306,
321, 326, 330, 334, 335, 338, 339,
340, 343
- Tarcov, Nathan, 339, 340
- Tarlton, Chales D., 32, 33
- Taylor, Charles, 323
- theory, myth of, 262, 263, 273, 295,
300-302, 304, 307
- Thompson, E.P., 231
- Thucydides, 56
- time, 217, 220, 221, 224, 227-29,
231-34, 274, 323, 354
- Tocqueville, Alexis de, 53, 189, 260
- Toennies, Ferdinand, 204
- Tolstoy, Leo, 128
- Touraine, Alain, 232, 233, 234
- tradition, 12, 22-24, 53, 55, 71, 76,
78-80, 83-87, 99, 175, 177-79,
180-82, 188, 220, 226, 334,
339-42, 348, 360, 363
- tradition, great, 26, 27, 28, 31
- tradition, myth of the, 14, 16, 23, 25,
26, 27, 28, 29, 36, 38, 48, 49, 56,
58, 59, 69, 70, 86, 87, 113, 117,
152, 221, 222, 262, 264, 273, 281,
295, 296, 300, 302, 303, 306, 328,
329, 350, 360, 361, 365
- truth, 337, 348
- universalism, 75
- Unruh, Jesse, 16
- Vietnam, 53, 281, 284
- Voegelin, Eric, 23-25, 28, 36, 48, 60,
69, 76, 164, 166n, 168n, 211, 322,
326, 330, 335
- Wallace, John, 25
- Walzer, Michael, 3
- Watergate, 53
- Weber, Max, 1, 15, 16, 20n, 47, 84,
221, 222, 223, 235, 241, 263, 264,
274, 299, 323, 345
- Williams, Raymond, 186, 196n
- Wills, Garry, 229, 236n
- Winch, Peter, 225, 252, 323
- Wittgenstein, Ludwig, 6, 150, 156-62,
165, 169n, 258, 267, 268, 292,
299, 323, 344, 345, 347
- Wolin, Sheldon, 14, 16, 23, 28, 36,
69, 76, 147, 164, 166n, 168n, 211,
212, 262, 304, 306, 321, 332-38,
340, 341, 343
- women's studies, 187
- Xenophon, 83, 86

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John S. Nelson, Editor

This book reassesses the academic field of political theory and brings into sharp relief its problems and opportunities. Here for the first time, diverse theorists coordinate their arguments through a common focus. This focus is the writing of John G. Gunnell.

Gunnell attacks a set of myths said to plague almost every recent theory about politics: the myth of the given, the myth of science, myths of theory, the myth of the tradition, and the myth of the political. He argues that these all alienate political theory from substantive inquiry and actual practice.

Contributors include Richard E. Flathman, Russell L. Hanson, George Kateb, Paul F. Kress, J. Donald Moon, John S. Nelson, J.G.A. Pocock, Herbert G. Reid, Ira L. Strauber, Nathan Tarcov, and Sheldon S. Wolin. They respond on behalf of projects in the new history of political theory, epic theory, phenomenology, traditional theory, and political deconstruction. These discussions also address the theories of Hans-Georg Gadamer, Jürgen Habermas, Karl Marx, Leo Strauss, Alain Touraine, and Ludwig Wittgenstein.

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Political Theory: Contemporary Issues
John G. Gunnell, Editor*

John S. Nelson is Associate Professor of Political Theory and Co-Director of The Rhetoric of Inquiry Project at the University of Iowa. His book, *What Should Political Theory Be Now*, was also published by the SUNY Press.

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